Bengaluru Monday, March 23, 2026 Pages 14 Vol 79 No 81 ₹7

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DH

DECCAN HERALD

The Power of Good

Duplantis soars to pole vault gold

Swedish superstar wins fourth straight world indoor title with 6.25m record

Page 14

Govt moots takeover of land gifted for schools, colleges

Bill to validate informal gifts to be tabled in House

SUJAY B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

The state government will soon enact a law to formally take over immovable properties where a government educational institution has existed for at least 12 years, despite having no registered documents of transfer.

Through the Karnataka Government Educational Institution (Protection and Regularisation) Bill, 2026, the government aims to prevent "stale claims or legal proceedings against such lands beyond a 12-year period of undisputed use."

The Bill, drafted by the Department of School Education and Literacy, is expected to be tabled in the ongoing Budget session.

The land will belong to the government even if the donor has passed away, and provisions of the Transfer of Property Act, 1982, are not followed.

The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill notes that government educational institutions and functioning on lands donated by individuals and families without proper formal documentation are facing litigation due to claims by their legal heirs. There exists no dedicated legislation to protect such lands or validate informal gifts made for public education.

▸ **Educational land, Page 4**

Latest in the conflict

- Israel's military strikes a **key bridge** in south Lebanon; rocket fire from Lebanon **kills one in northern Israel**
- WHO warns that strikes around **nuclear sites** in Iran and Israel pushed the war to a **"perilous stage"**
- **3 Turkish nationals** and **3 Qatari military** personnel among 6 killed in a helicopter crash in Qatar's territorial waters

Trump sets 48-hr deadline on Hormuz

Threatens to strike power plants; Iran warns of retaliation, total closure of strait

TEL AVIV/TEHRAN/DUBAI, AGENCIES

Smoke rises after an Israeli strike on a key bridge near Qasmiyeh, Lebanon, on Sunday. REUTERS

Iran and the US traded threats over critical energy infrastructure in West Asia, with Tehran vowing Sunday to retaliate if President Donald Trump followed through on a warning that he could target Iranian power plants.

Trump said late Saturday the US would destroy Iran's "various POWER PLANTS, STARTING WITH THE BIGGEST ONE FIRST!", if Iran did not fully open the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours.

Tehran dismissed the ultimatum as it launched a new round of attacks on Israel and issued its own warning.

Ebrahim Zolfaghari, an Iranian military spokesperson, vowed Sunday that if Iranian energy sites were attacked, it would strike more infrastructure in the region used by Israel, the US and American allies, such as fuel depots and desalination plants.

Iran also said the Strait of Hormuz would be "completely closed" immediately if the US follows up on Trump's new threat.

"If the US' threats regarding power plants are carried out... the Strait of Hormuz will be completely closed, and it will not be reopened until our destroyed power plants are rebuilt," the military's operational command Khatam Al-Anbiya said.

▸ **US, Iran threaten, Page 4**

PM reviews energy situation

As the West Asia conflict enters the fourth week, PM Narendra Modi on Sunday held a high-level meeting to review the energy situation in the country. The meeting was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri.

Details on Page 5

Digital arrest cases drop in K'taka, but cyber crooks evolving

DH SPECIAL

PRAJWAL D'SOUZA
BENGALURU, DHNS

Despite a massive decline in 'digital arrest' cases last year, the threat posed by the infamous cybercrime still looms large in Karnataka, police say.

According to an analysis by *DH* of the recent Karnataka Home Ministry data, last year witnessed a major trend — both in terms of reduction of cases and the way this particular cybercrime evolved into weaponising recent and real news to convince the victims.

The data showed that cases across the state dropped from 1,129 in 2024 to 345 in 2025, a 69.4% decline. In 2023, there were 196 digital arrest cases.

However, further analysis paints a darker picture: despite the sharp drop in cases, the overall monetary loss in both years remained closer.

▸ **Digital arrest, Page 4**

FRAUD IN FIGURES

Year	Cases	Y-o-Y change	Money lost
2023	196	-	₹22.53 cr
2024	1,129	+476.02%	₹219.43 cr
2025	345	-69.44%	₹215.14 cr
2026*	25	-	₹11.58 cr

*Till Feb — Source: State home ministry

Notorious crime

It involves scamsters posing as law enforcement officials holding the victims under 24x7 online video surveillance, forcing them to empty their bank accounts.

Cong announces bypoll candidates

The Congress has announced the candidature of Umesh Meti and Samarth Mallikarjun for the bypolls in Bagalkot and Davangere South, respectively. The bypolls were necessitated by the demise of HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa. While Umesh is Meti's son, Samarth is Shamanur's grandson and Mining Minister SS Mallikarjun's son.

Details on Page 4

3 women die in accident near Devanahalli

BENGALURU, DHNS: Three women from Tumakuru district, who were headed for a pilgrimage to Varanasi, were killed on the spot after the vehicle they were travelling in collided with a lorry near Devanahalli in the early hours of Sunday.

The victims, all residents of Tiptur, were part of a group travelling to Bengaluru airport to catch a flight to Varanasi.

Details on Page 3

ALTERNATIVE FUEL

Piped gas extension to benefit 25k homes

DH SPECIAL

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

Amid concerns over LPG supply due to the war in West Asia, the state government has approved the expansion of piped natural gas (PNG) connections for over 25,000 households and 69 commercial establishments in Bengaluru.

However, the project involves extensive road cutting for laying the pipelines, which is likely to cause significant distress to commuters.

In a letter dated March 17, Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh requested the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) and four of the five corporations to support the expansion of GAIL network by providing road-cutting permissions on a "priority and emergency basis." She also suggested that the corporations can take a bank guarantee of Rs 50 lakh from the agency.

The letter comes at a time when the GBA or the corporations had stopped entertaining any requests for cutting of roads. There was also resistance from the local elected representatives as well as the traffic police.

The note, however, refers to providing road-cutting permissions only in Bengaluru South, North, East and West.

▸ **PNG, Page 4**

Lamborghini seized after dangerous stunts

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Cubbon Park Traffic Police have seized a Lamborghini following a reckless drifting incident at the busy Anil Kumble Circle. Police are currently probing whether Ricky Rai, son of the late underworld don-turned-philanthropist Muthappa Rai, was behind the wheel. The action follows a series of complaints regarding dangerous stunts.

Details on Page 3

SIKSHA 'O' ANUSANDHAN (DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

SIKSHA 'O' ANUSANDHAN
SAAT-2026

Accredited by NAAC with Grade 'A++' | UGC Graded Autonomy(Category-I) | NBA Accredited | ICAR Accredited | NABL Accredited | NABH Accredited

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Electronics and Communication Engineering

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Computer Science and Information Technology

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Computer Science and Engineering (Internet of Things)

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M. Pharm

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National Institutional Ranking Framework 2025
15th in University Category
22nd in Engineering Category
15th in Medical Category
09th in Dental Category
10th in Law Category

Globally Ranked By
QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS
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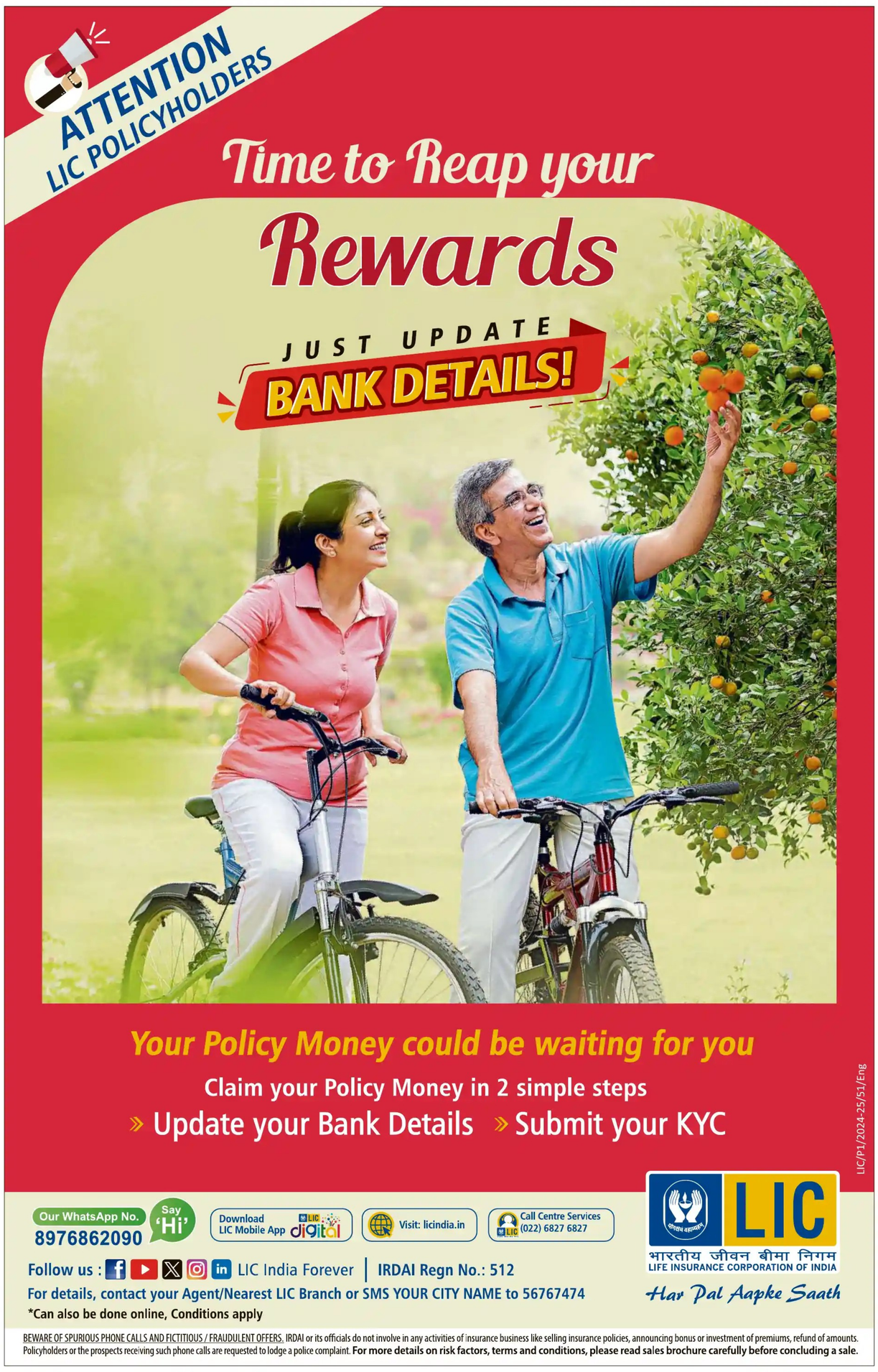
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LIC/P1/2024-25/51/Eng

LPG shortage: PG owners demand 500 cylinders a day

BENGALURU, DHNS: Amid a short supply of LPG cylinders in the city, the Federation of PG Owners Welfare Association on Sunday held a core committee meeting to decide its next course of action.

Among the key demands put forth by the members is the government's intervention in setting aside at least 500 LPG cylinders daily for paying guest (PG) accommodations.

"There are at least 15,000 PGs only in Bengaluru where lakhs of people stay. The state government has assured us that they would provide us adequate LPG cylinders. We will meet the officers on Monday with a petition to provide supply immediately," association president Arun Kumar said.

The meeting, held in Whitefield, saw PG owners from across Bengaluru participate.

BBMP's 2024 decongestion report scrutinised for plagiarism

Up to 75 per cent overlaps with earlier BMRCL study

BENGALURU, DHNS

A study on decongesting city traffic, commissioned by the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) in December 2024, has come under scrutiny for plagiarism.

Substantial portions of the report closely mirror a 2022 study prepared by the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL).

A glance through both documents indicates that between 60 and 75 per cent of the BBMP report shows clear overlap with the earlier study.

A significant portion — over 200 pages, including pictures — appears to be directly reproduced. Popular Artificial Intelligence tools describe the extent of plagiarism as "high and extensive".

The findings assume significance as the BBMP report went on to suggest a number of projects, including a controversial 40-km tunnel road proposal and a network of 14 flyovers, while the BMRCL study focused on immediate and low-cost upgrades, such as improvement in traffic management and public transport.

This has raised fears that the tunnel road proposal may be developed on plagiarised material. In addition, the BBMP spent Rs 5.5 crore for the report, which was prepared by New Delhi-based Altinok Consulting and Engineering Inc. Urban Mass Transit Company was the consulting firm behind the BMRCL study.

A side-by-side comparison shows that Altinok has largely borrowed entire sections, including the city profile, traffic analysis and methodology, from the BMRCL report.

Key portions describing Bengaluru's demographics, vehicular growth and congestion patterns are reproduced verbatim, with identical data, wording and structure. Sections detailing BMTC operations and metro services have also been replicated, with matching statistics and phrasing. The methodology chapter begins with identical language and follows the same analytical framework as the earlier report.

Adding to the concerns, the BBMP commissioned a fresh traffic study despite the Directorate of Urban Land Transport (DULT) having already prepared a Comprehensive Mobility Plan for Bengaluru. This plan also played a critical role in getting approval for Namma Metro Phase II (A) and Phase II (B).

Mobility experts believe that the BBMP commissioned the study to propose capital-intensive projects such as tunnel roads, instead of designing scientific solutions.

Satya Arikutharam, independent mobility expert, said the staggering extent of plagiarism simply makes the report unacceptable.

"Not only did the BBMP pay Rs 5.5 crore for a recycled old study, but Bengaluru now faces a situation where it has proposed various car-centric projects based on an unscientific report," he said. "The government must introspect and drop the tunnel road project. It must establish the Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) and update the existing mobility plan."

BS Prahallad, technical director of Bengaluru Smart Infrastructure Ltd (B-SMILE), defended the work, stating that all earlier study material should invariably be used for reference purposes.

Breakdown of copied pages by section

Section	Status
Intro & background	Identical
Study area	Identical
Methodology	Identical
Tumakuru Road	Verbatim copy
JC Road	Verbatim copy
Kanakapura Road	Verbatim copy
Mysuru Road	Verbatim copy

SATYA ARIKUTHARAM
Independent mobility expert

"Not only did the BBMP pay Rs 5.5 crore for a recycled old study, but Bengaluru now faces a situation where it has proposed various car-centric projects based on an unscientific report.

Heavy traffic expected near Freedom Park for next 3 days

BENGALURU, DHNS: Heavy traffic congestion is expected in and around Freedom Park between Monday and Wednesday due to large-scale protests organised by various groups.

The Upparpet traffic police has announced temporary diversions to manage the movement of protesters and vehicles, particularly along Seshadri Road.

Commuters are advised to plan their travel in advance and use alternative routes to avoid delays.

These are the temporary traffic restrictions and alternative routes:

From Khoday Circle/ Shanthala Junction towards Anand Rao flyover: Proceed via Lulu Mall Road, Rajiv Gandhi Circle, Mantri Mall, Swastik Circle, and Race Course Road.

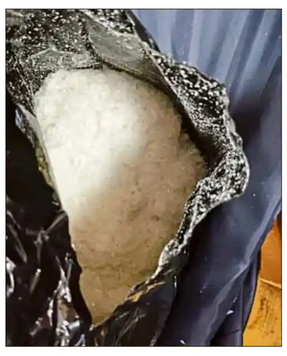
From Mysore Bank towards Chalukya Circle: Divert via KG Road, Sagar Junction, Elite, TB Road, and Swastik Circle.

From Chalukya Circle towards Mysore Bank: Use Raj Bhavan Road, Infantry Road, and Indian Express Road.

From Kalidasa Road/ Kanakadasa Junction towards Freedom Park: Turn right at Kanakadasa Junction towards Sagar Junction.

From Maurya/Subbanna Junction: Turn right towards Anand Rao Circle.

DRI busts crystal meth racket, arrests 3; seizes Rs 8.3-cr drugs



The narcotic substance seized by the investigators. PHOTO: DRI

BENGALURU, DHNS: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has uncovered a major smuggling network of the banned drug crystal meth and arrested three people.

Officials said drugs worth Rs 8.3 crore were seized.

Officers of the DRI's Bengaluru Zonal Unit, acting on specific intelligence, intercepted a 26-year-old male passenger of Mizoram origin upon his arrival from New Delhi at the KSR railway station here.

"Upon examining his baggage, around 8.3 kilograms of a psychotropic substance, suspected to be methamphetamine hydrochloride, popularly known as crystal meth, with an illicit market value of Rs 8.3 crore, was recovered," the DRI said. "The quantity recovered falls within the ambit of commercial quantity under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

"Based on further investigation and follow-up action, two additional persons linked to the case were identified and intercepted at separate locations in Bengaluru. Both are local residents, aged approximately 25 and 29 years. In all, three people have been apprehended and arrested in the case."

Investigators further searched the premises of one of the suspects and recovered 200 SIM cards, at least 45 debit or credit cards, and several mobile phones, suspected to have been used in the operation and facilitation of the drug trafficking network.

"The seized contraband and other incriminating material have been taken into custody under provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985," the DRI said.

BJP forms 12-member team to oversee GBA elections

BENGALURU, DHNS: The BJP has constituted a 12-member state-level committee to oversee elections to the five corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

The panel includes State BJP President BY Vijayendra, Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka, Leader of the Opposition in the Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, and Union Ministers V Somanna and Shobha Karandlaje, among others.

The party has also appointed separate teams to supervise the polls in each of the five corporations — Bengaluru East, West, South, North and Central.

Additionally, in-charges have been designated for all 27 Assembly constituencies in Bengaluru.

The GBA elections are expected to be held soon.

Mazumdar-Shaw extends support for tunnel road project

BENGALURU, DHNS

Amid criticism over the utility of the tunnel road project in Bengaluru, Biocon Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw extended support, noting several global cities have such systems.

"In every city in the world, tunnels can cut the distance and create new passageways. I think it is important," Kiran told *DH* on the sidelines of an event, marking the 25th annual St Patrick's Day celebrations in the city on Sunday.

An Honorary Consul General of Ireland, Kiran said Bengaluru has become too large for its existing road network. While noting that the Metro has begun to reduce travel time, she stressed the need for a full network to ensure seamless connectivity.

"The traffic has improved, I came much faster to the venue today than I normally do," she said. She also said a holistic approach is required. "It is not just the Metro. The roads have to be done; the traffic signalling has to be better."

The event, co-hosted by HE Kevin Kelly, Ambassador of Ireland to India, celebrated Kiran's long-standing role, since 2001, in fostering bilateral ties spanning innovation, trade, and technology between the two nations.

Kelly noted that Ireland, while one of 27 EU countries, accounts for 10 per cent of total EU trade with India, amounting to nearly EUR 16 billion. "There is a real uptick in our relationship, from partnerships between universities to our Supreme Courts. We need to get it to go even further," Kelly said.

The event was attended by members of the city's Irish community and prominent industry leaders.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Honorary Consul General of Ireland and Chairperson of Biocon, along with (R) HE Kevin Kelly, Ambassador of Ireland to India, at the 25th St Patrick's Day celebrations in the city on Sunday. DH PHOTO

5 years on, Banaswadi rotary flyover remains a non-starter

Frustrated civic groups launch online petition

BENGALURU, DHNS

The proposal to decongest Dodda Banaswadi main road near Mukunda theatre has been a non-starter.

The civic body had proposed construction of an elevated rotary flyover at least five years ago. Fed up with the prolonged delay, over a dozen civic groups have launched an online petition, renewing their demand to start the long-pending project.

In its online petition, which has already received 2,500 signatories, the Bengaluru Mobility Federation describes the traffic bottleneck as a decade-old problem that continues to disrupt daily life for thousands of commuters.

"Our families experience this challenge daily, worsening pollution and extending commute time, which cuts into our professional efficiency, time spent with families, and overall well-being," the petition read.

The federation comprises several Residents' Welfare Associations (RWAs) representing areas such as Banaswadi, Kalyan Nagar, Horamavu, Hennur, HRBR Layout, Kamanahalli and Ramamurthy Nagar, among others. The members recently met Energy Minister KJ George, MLA of Sarvagnanagar, to expedite the project.

The proposed rotary flyover above the IOC Junction is seen as a critical intervention to decongest Dodda Banaswadi main road, a key link between North Bengaluru and the city centre, including Indiranagar, Baiyappanahalli, Fraser Town and Pulakeshinagar.

Residents say resolving this bottleneck could have a cascading impact on easing traffic flow across the north-east, especially as motorists are now travelling longer distances to avoid the existing narrow flyover at Mukunda theatre. As a result, congestion is seen along Old Madras Road near Baiyappanahalli and at Lingarajapuram flyover as well.

Officials are yet to confirm timelines for the project's execution. They said the proposal to engage a construction firm, selected through the tendering process, has been sent to the Urban Development Department (UDD) for approval.

The proposed rotary flyover above the IOC Junction is set to unclog a vital Banaswadi corridor, and improve connectivity to Indiranagar and surrounding areas. DH FILE PHOTO

Project status update

- Officials are yet to confirm timelines for the project's execution.
- The proposal to appoint a construction firm — selected through the tendering process — has been submitted to the Urban Development Department (UDD) for approval.

Man killed over financial dispute

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 27-year-old man was allegedly murdered in East Bengaluru on Sunday.

Police said the deceased, Kiran, unemployed and unmarried, had five cases against his name. They said he was murdered between 4 and 4.30 am near KR Puram.

Police have detained two people — 28-year-old auto driver Yuvaraj S and a 26-year-old storage boy of an e-commerce company Gangaraj S, and said that arrest procedures and interrogation are underway.

The suspects allegedly hit Kiran with a weapon after intercepting him on TC Palya Main Road. Police said the head injury suggests a blunt object was used.

"Before the murder, the suspects and the victim had an argument, which culminated in the murder," a police officer said. "Yuvaraj had hit Kiran with a jack lever. The suspects, who saw Kiran collapse on the spot after the attack, fled. A financial conflict is suspected to be the motive behind the murder."

Senior officers, including Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Vikram Amathe, visited the spot along with Scene of Crime Officers (SOCOs). The body was sent for post-mortem.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Birth Anniversary: Devanga Devara Dasimayya; Organised by Devanga Sangha; Ramalinga Chowdeshwari Temple, Devanga Hostel Road, Sampangiramnagar; from 7 am onwards.

Brahma Rathotsava: Kakolu Venugopalaswamy; Organised by Kakolu Venugopalaswamy Temple Trust; Kakolu Kshetra, near Rajanukunte, Yelahanka; 9 am.

Workshop: On Media; KV Prabhakar, S Ravikumar, Prof Jayakara SM to attend; Organised by Department of Electronic Media, Bangalore University; 10.30 am.

CULTURAL

Anniversary: 'Kaviyana-Savigana'; Renu Kumar, Mohan Krishna, Nataraj Shettikere, M Lakshminarayana to attend; Organised by Kanasu Cultural Trust; Samskrutika Samuchaya, Kalagrama, Mallathahalli; 3 pm.

Play: 'Ambedkar Collage' by Kotiganahalli Ramaiah; Organised by Buddi Deepa; Kondajji Basappa Auditorium, Palace Road; 6 pm.

Classical Music: Lavanya Krishnamurthy and troupe to perform; Organised by Vyalikaval Extension Association; Sri Rama Temple, 9th Main Road, Vyalikaval; 6.30 pm.

Invites to be published in this column should be sent to: **incitytoday@deccanherald.co.in.** Please note that hard copies will not be accepted

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST

Generally cloudy sky with light rain

TEMPERATURES

Maximum	33.0°C
Minimum	22.0°C
Rainfall (as of 8:30 am)	NIL
Humidity (as of 5:30 pm)	48%
Sunset (Mar 23)	6:31 pm
Sunrise (Mar 24)	6:23 am
Moonrise	8:36 am
Moonset	9:46 pm

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

JOURNEY TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD

City duo sets out to conquer Mt Everest in expedition attempt

BENGALURU, DHNS

To mark its diamond jubilee year, the Karnataka Mountaineering Association (KMA) on Sunday flagged off two city-based climbers for an ambitious expedition to Mount Everest.

In a ceremony held in the city, the association handed over the national tricolour, the Karnataka state emblem and the KMA flag, along with ice axes, to Santhosh Devarajappa and Chinmayi Trishulamurthy. The duo is scheduled to attempt the summit during the peak climbing window of April and May.

The climbers will take the traditional South Col route from the Nepal side to reach the summit of the world's highest peak, which stands at 29,031 feet above sea level.

The flagging-off event saw the presence of Sudhakar, senior member of Karnataka Mountaineering Association (KMA); Nagendra, KMA secretary; Retd IAS officer Manjunath Prasad N; climbers Santhosh Devarajappa and Chinmayi Trishulamurthy; and Tulasi Maddineni, secretary, Backward Classes Welfare Department. DH PHOTO

Navigating thin air

Speaking about the upcoming challenge, the mountaineers acknowledged the physical and environmental hurdles ahead.

"At that altitude, the combination of frequent avalanches and the thin air, or low oxygen levels, poses a significant challenge," the duo stated. "However, drawing from our previous climbing experience, we are confident in our preparation.

"We believe Mission Everest-8848m will be a success."

The expedition holds special significance as it coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Karnataka Mountaineering Association. By sponsoring its own members for this elite feat, KMA aims to bolster the spirit of adventure sports in the state.

The flagging-off event saw the presence of several dignitaries, including Tulasi Maddineni, secretary, Backward Classes Welfare Department; Manjunath Prasad N, retired IAS officer; Nagendra, secretary of KMA; and Sudhakar, senior member of the association.

PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @deccanherald.co.in

Moonlit nights slowly fading in our cities

In areas like HSR Layout, municipal authorities have installed bright LED streetlights that keep entire neighborhoods fully illuminated through the night. While this improves safety and visibility, it also means there is little to no darkness — even on clear, moonlit nights.

For many city-born children and young adults, this removes the quiet experience of walking under natural moonlight.

Perhaps authorities could consider switching off streetlights for a few hours on especially bright moonlit nights, allowing people to reconnect, even briefly, with the natural night sky.

Dr Obi Reddy A
HSR Layout

Bengaluru, not bombed Beirut

This isn't a scene from bombed cities like Tehran or Beirut — it's Uttarahalli Main Road (Vasanthapura ward) right here in Namma Bengaluru.

For the past five months, one side of the road has been completely dug up and left unattended.

Needless to say, this situation poses a serious risk to life and safety.

I urge the authorities concerned, including the BWSSB and the local civic body, to take immediate action and resolve this issue without any further delay.

P Girish

For the past five months, one side of Uttarahalli Main Road has been completely dug up and left unattended..

Bizman loses over Rs 15 cr in 'digital arrest'

BELAGAVI, PTI: A 81-year-old businessman allegedly lost over Rs 15 crore in a "digital arrest scam" after fraudsters posing as CBI officials accused him of involvement in a financial crime, police said on Sunday.

According to officials, the senior citizen received multiple calls, including video calls, for nearly six weeks. The fraudsters claimed that the victim received a Rs 5 lakh commission for laundering Rs 25 lakh and that complaints have been filed against him.

Threatening to arrest him in a money laundering case, they coerced the victim into transferring the money to a "safe or government account". They assured him that amount would be returned after the investigation.

The victim grew suspicious as he received no communication from the callers and found all mobile numbers untraceable, following which he complained to the police last week.

The Cyber, Economic and Narcotics (CEN) police station officials, who investigated the case, traced the account to which the money was transferred and recovered only Rs 90 lakh.

Industries switching to captive power on the rise: Bescom data

Tariff uncertainty, disruptions drive them off grid

SNEHA RAMESH
BENGALURU, DHNS:

The number of industries shifting to the use of captive power generation by setting up their own power plants has more than doubled from 203 in 2020-21 to 498 by 2024-25, according to data available with Bescom.

The energy consumed through captive generation has also increased by 1,600 MUs during this period.

Captive generation refers to industries setting up their own power plants to meet their energy demand and moving away from dependence on Bescom.

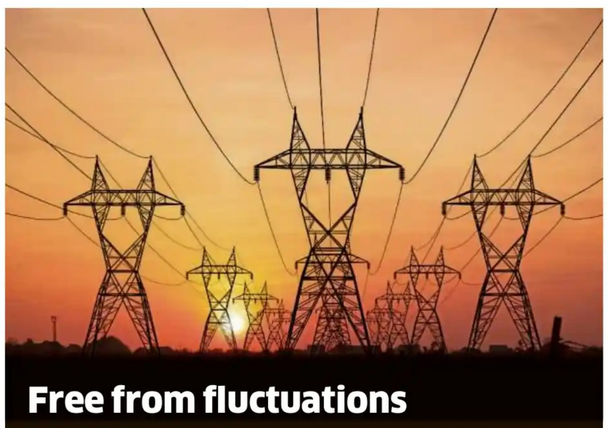
Experts said the uncertainty of tariff had pushed many of them to opt for captive generation.

Recently, the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) increased the tariff for industries and commercial establishments by revising the multi-year order it had passed in March 2025.

"Multi-year orders are designed to ensure certainty of price. It helps industries determine the input cost to calculate pricing for products. The uncertainty in tariff results in losses. Hence, many of them choose captive production," said M G Prabhakar, energy expert and former advisory council member, Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC).

An industrialist from Peenya industrial area said that the trend is now picking up and more and more industries are expected to transition to captive energy generation.

"As industrialists, for us certainty in operating cost is crucial. That decides our profits. If the power price is fluctuating, even a small increase will have a big effect on us. Hence, many of us are exploring alternative options available," said Sudhakar M who runs a polymer industry.



Free from fluctuations

Industries opting for captive power generation	Year	No. of industries	Output (in MUs*)
	2020-21	203	1,006.34
	2021-22	214	1,089.26
	2022-23	233	1,507.56
	2023-24	335	2,237.79
*MILLION UNITS	2024-25	498	2,622.95

However, the norms to set up captive generation plants are stringent, limiting the number of industries adopting it, the industrialists said.

"Only big industries with a capacity of more than 500kW are allowed to instal a captive generation plant. As a result, many small industries are not able to set up plants. We have written to the energy department to allow smaller industries to form groups and set up plants. If this relaxation is provided, more industries will shift to captive generation," said Shiva Kumar R from Peenya Industries Association.

Better quality power without unscheduled disruptions added to the benefits, the industrialists said. Experts said industries could recover the capital investment within five to eight years, making captive generation a good long-term solution.

That apart, many industries are opting to purchase energy from open access generators.

While the number of industries moving away from the grid is not very high, industry experts said this trend could pick up soon.

While acknowledging that more industries were shifting to captive power, the government is also trying to retain consumers, senior Bescom officials said.

"We are offering the HT industrial consumers the discounted energy rate scheme (DERS) to retain them. Under this, they will be charged less for consumption beyond their base consumption. This way, we are trying to retain them," a senior official explained to *DH*.

The official said the numbers (of industries switching to captive power) were still low and the transition wasn't affecting Bescom's operations.

Three Kashi-bound women from Tiptur die in TT-lorry crash en route to KIA

BENGALURU, DHNS

Three women from Tiptur in Tumakuru district, who were headed for a Kashi pilgrimage, were killed on the spot after their Tempo Traveller (TT) collided with a truck near Devanahalli in the early hours of Sunday.

The deceased have been identified as Jayamma (65), Yashodhamma (60), and Ganga (40), all residents of Vidyanagar in Tiptur.

According to the police, the victims were part of a group of 15 people travelling from Tiptur to the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA). They were scheduled to board a 6 am flight to Kashi. The group had left Tiptur at 10 pm on Saturday night to reach the airport in time.

The accident occurred on the Satellite Town Ring Road (STRR) near Rani Cross on the outskirts of Devanahalli.

Preliminary investigations suggest that a navigation error may have played a role in the crash. The driver of the TT reportedly missed a turn suggested by Google Map. In an attempt to rectify the route, the driver tried to take a U-turn further ahead, during which a speeding truck rammed into the vehicle.

The remaining passengers in the vehicle sustained injuries and were rushed to a private hospital in Devanahalli, where they are currently undergoing treatment. The grievously injured - Chandrakala, Chandramma, Vaishnavi and Kempamma - are being treated in ICU.

The Devanahalli Traffic Police have registered a case and have initiated a detailed investigation into the collision.

Centre has agreed for crafts village at Channapatna: Lahar Singh Siroya

BENGALURU, DHNS: BJP Rajya Sabha member Lahar Singh Siroya said on Sunday that the Centre was ready to proceed with the idea of crafts village.

Taking to X, he said he had urged the Centre to consider a crafts village near Channapatna (Bengaluru South district).

"I received a response from Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh, who said that the Centre will go forward with the idea if agencies of the state government come forward with a financial proposal and suitable land allocation."

IISc's new initiative SEED links lab to rural livelihoods

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

The second campus of Indian Institute of Science (IISc) at Challakere in Chitradurga district, through its Science and Engineering for Economic Development (SEED) initiative, is attempting to bridge the gap between the laboratory and livelihoods, especially for the underprivileged rural community.

SEED, an initiative under Foundation for Science Innovation and Development (FSID) that acts as a single-window interface between IISc and external world, aspires to translate complex science into income-generating solutions for marginal farmers, weavers and rural entrepreneurs.

Amitava Pramanik, head of SEED, said while other verticals of FSID deal with premier research labs from India and abroad, help execute strategic programmes and incubate startups, SEED focuses on targeted research for upliftment of farmers, artisans and rural entrepreneurs.

"The goal is to translate science into deployable solutions," says Pramanik. "We don't just do science for science's sake, we look at how it can solve rudimentary problems".

Because IISc lacks a formal agriculture department, SEED has signed an MoU with the University of Agricultural Sciences (GKVK).

This partnership allows the institute to address farming-related issues by combining IISc's engineering expertise with GKVK's agricultural insights.

Also, IISc faculties have helped develop technologies for extracting valuable proteins from waste sheep wool, bio-filter to purify water for recirculating in aquaculture systems for fish-farming in water-stressed areas, novel design of mobile laboratory for rural education, etc.

SEED, an initiative of the Foundation for Science Innovation and Development, aspires to translate complex science into income-generating solutions for marginal farmers, weavers and rural entrepreneurs. PHOTO COURTESY/IISC

Where & for whom

- Experiment-based STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education to rural schools in and around IISc's campus at Challakere in Chitradurga district.
- Focus on moulding rural youth and women into entrepreneurs by providing them access to IISc-developed relevant technologies.

The process begins with outreach programmes where farmers and local youth are invited to the Challakere campus. "We don't decide problems from our office in Bengaluru," Pramanik says.

"We listen to the community to understand their needs, then find the right faculty to develop a technological solution."

Whether it is reducing agricultural waste, converting wastes into saleable products, adding value to existing harvests or improving efficiency of local weavers, the focus is on targeted research for the underprivileged. For this, SEED is planning an incubation centre at the Challakere campus soon.

While IISc runs multiple-level boot camps on STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education for school and college teachers, training over 15,000 teachers to date, SEED has adopted a handful of local schools and is helping students get quality STEM education via science activities.

Muthappa Rai's son Ricky Rai under radar for Lamborghini stunts

Police seize high-end car, issue notice to Ricky

BENGALURU, DHNS

The Cubbon Park Traffic Police have seized a Lamborghini car following a reckless drifting incident at the busy Anil Kumble Circle. Police are currently probing whether Ricky Rai, son of the late underworld don-turned-philanthropist Muthappa Rai, was behind the wheel during the stunts.

The police action follows a series of complaints regarding the white lambhorghini car performing dangerous maneuvers, including "donuts," on public roads in the heart of the city on Saturday.

Acting on leads and viral footage, a team led by Cubbon Park Traffic police traced the vehicle, bearing registration number KA 05 NR 0009, to a residence in Sadashivnagar. A senior traffic police officer confirmed that the car was seized from the premises on Sunday.

The seized Lamborghini car seen parked outside Cubbon Park police station in Bengaluru on Sunday. The luxury car was reportedly impounded by police for traffic violations and reckless driving near Anil Kumble Circle. DH PHOTO

"We have seized the car and issued a formal notice to Ricky Rai to appear for questioning," the officer stated. "We have yet to identify who was operating the vehicle at the time of the incident."

However, Rai's lawyer told *DH*, that the car belongs to Ricky Rai, who was abroad when the incident occurred. Rai's driver reportedly took the vehicle for a spin at night and braked hard at the junction, causing the car to drift in circles.

To establish definitive ownership, the police have notified the Regional Transport Office (RTO) to verify the registered owner's details and documentation. While preliminary suspicions point toward Rai's involvement, police maintained that they are awaiting a formal statement from him and further digital evidence.

Texas LPG tanker reaches New Mangalore Port; multiple vessels expected in coming days

MANGALURU, DHNS: Pyxis Pioneer, a LPG tanker sailing under the flag of Singapore called on New Mangalore Port on Sunday morning. The LPG tanker with a gross tonnage of 47,236 tonnes had sailed out of Port of Nederland, Texas, in the United States of America on February 14. It will unload 16,714 MT of LPG for Aegis Logistics Ltd at the Port and will sail out on Monday morning, as per NMP Authority's Daily Vessel Position.

Russian oil-laden tanker—Aqua Titan that called on Saturday night completed unloading 96099.80 MT of crude oil at Single Mooring Point (SPM) of MRPL on Sunday, NMPA sources informed *DH*. The vessel with Urals cargo that it loaded from a Baltic Sea port in late January had set sail for Rizhao port in China, and changed course in Southeast Asia and headed New Mangalore port.

Another LPG tanker Apollo Ocean likely to call on New Mangalore Port on March 25 to discharge 26,687 MT of LPG for Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and Bharat Petroleum corporation Ltd. The vessel, sailing under the Vietnam flag, has gross tonnage of 46,025 MT.

According to NMP Authority's Daily Vessel Position, MRPL is expected to receive multiple consignments in the coming days. The vessel Oasis is scheduled to deliver 99,900 MT of crude on Monday.

Vessel Bourbon, is expected on March 24 with 20,000 MT of ATF (L), and vessel Qiu Chi, also due on March 24 is carrying 35,000 MT of motor spirit (L) for MRPL. With multiple vessels lined up, it is likely to provide some respite to fuel supply chains, said a source.

Pyxis Pioneer, a vessel which left Port of Nederland in Texas, brought 16,714 MT of LPG, at New Mangalore Port in Mangaluru on Sunday. PTI PHOTO

20 women, transgenders get free electric autos

BENGALURU, DHNS: Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy announced on Sunday that the government would extend support to women and transgender individuals in availing subsidized electric autos, with the aim to promote financial independence and sustainable livelihoods.

Speaking at an event organised by Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC) and CGI here, the minister distributed free electric autos to 20 women and transgender individuals who successfully completed driving training.

Reddy said the government would provide subsidies for the purchase of electric autos for women and ensure priority for them in obtaining driving licenses.

He announced that 10 additional electric autos would be distributed free of cost through his own foundation.

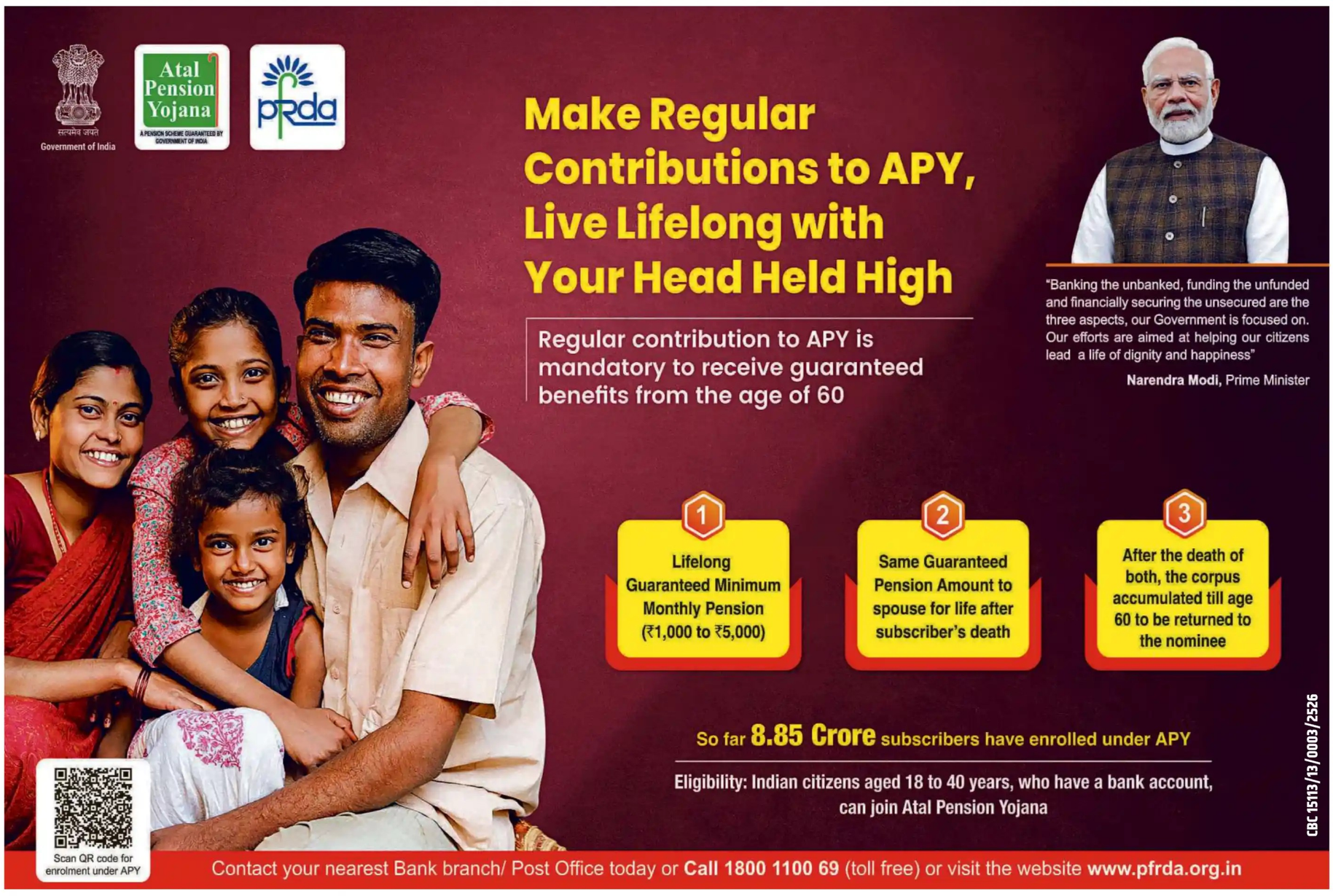
Highlighting the growing participation of women across sectors, he said while women's literacy and employment rates had improved significantly, they taking to driving autos for a living was limited.

However, the increasing interest among women in this field was encouraging, he added. B PAC CEO Revathi Ashok emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between corporates and the government to scale up such initiatives.

She said over 400 women had already been trained, with a target of around 1,000 women auto drivers by the end of this year.

Senior vice president of CGI, Sudhir Sharma, expressed pride in supporting motivated women and transgender individuals in Bengaluru by helping them build sustainable careers through such training programmes.

The event was also attended by Biocon Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, CGI senior vice president Jennifer Mecheripaddi and others.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1 Lifelong Guaranteed Minimum Monthly Pension (₹1,000 to ₹5,000)
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Trump sets 48-hr deadline on Hormuz

US, Iran threaten, from Page 1

Under the international law, power plants that benefit the civilians can be targeted only if the military advantage outweighs the suffering that it causes to the civilians, according to legal scholars. Meanwhile, Israeli leaders visited Arad, one of two southern communities near a secretive nuclear research site struck by Iranian missiles late Saturday, wounding scores of people. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said it was a "miracle" that no one was killed in the incident.

The prime minister claimed thar Israel and the United States of America were well on their way to achieving their war goals. He called upon the international community for more support.

The main hospital in Southern Israel received at least 175 wounded from Arad and Dimona, its deputy director Roy Kessous told The Associated Press.

Iran said that its strikes in the Negev Desert late on Saturday were in retaliation for an earlier attack on the country's main nuclear enrichment site at Natanz.

Dangerous direction

The developments signalled the war was moving in a dangerous new direction, despite Trump's comment last week he was considering "winding down" operations.

Congress picks kin of erstwhile MLAs for byelections

Meti's son and Shamanur's grandson to contest bypolls

Samarth Shamanur

Umesh Meti

BENGALURU, DHNS:

Continuing its practice of fielding family members in most byelections, the Congress has announced Umesh Meti and Samarth Shamanur as the candidates for the Bagalkot and Davangere South constituencies, respectively.

The bypolls were necessitated due to the demise of Congress veterans H Y Meti (Bagalkot) Shamanur Shivashankarappa (Davangere South).

Shivashankarappa was a Lingayat strongman and the president of the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha at the time of his demise, while Meti hailed from the Kuruba community and was a loyalist of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

While Umesh is Meti's son, Samarth is Shamanur's grandson and is the son of Mining Minister S S Mallikarjun.

Umesh will face BJP's Veerabhadrayya (Veeranna) Charanthimath, while Samarth faces Srinivasa T Dasakariappa of the BJP.

Though it was a foregone conclusion that either Umesh or his brother Mallikarjun would get the seat, there was intense competition within the Congress on whether the Davanagere South seat should go to Shamanur's family or someone from the Muslim community, which has substantial numbers in the area.

Largest group

According to estimates, the Muslims are the largest group in the constituency, and have more than 70,000 electors.

Though Muslims have a population of 12.92% in Karnataka as per the 2011 Census (16% and the second largest group in the state after the Scheduled Castes, as per the leaked statistics of the 2015 social and educational survey), there are merely 10 Muslim legislators in the state, which has 224 Assembly seats (4.46%). All 10 are from the Congress.

In the 2023 Assembly elections, Shivashankarappa won by a comfortable margin of 27,888 votes over BJP candidate B G Ajay Kumar.

Bagalkot

The Bagalkot constituency will yet again see a fight between Charantimath and the Meti family.

For nearly two decades, Charantimath and Meti fought against each other in the constituency.

While Meti defeated Charantimath in the 2013 and 2023 polls, the BJP leader had won in 2008 and 2018 to become an MLA.

While Meti was a Kuruba, Charantimath is from the Jangama Lingayat community.

In Davangere South, the Congress has fielded a Lingayat (Samarth), while BJP candidate Srinivasa T Dasakariappa is from the Scheduled Tribes community.

Thus, both parties have fielded one Lingayat and another member from the Ahinda (Kannada acronym for minorities, OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) bloc.

March 23 (Monday) is the last day to file nominations. The polling is due on April 9 and results are slated for May 4.

Muslims stage a protest against denial of Congress ticket to their community for the Assembly by-election, in Davangere on Sunday. DH PHOTO/SATISH BADIGER

Davangere South: Muslims protest denial of Cong ticket to community

DAVANAGERE, DHNS

The Congress party's decision to field late MLA Shamanur Shivashankarappa's grandson Samarth Mallikarjun in the byelection to the Davanagere South Assembly seat has not gone down well with the Muslim community in Davanagere.

On Sunday, a group of Muslim youngsters, which included Congress members, descended on Akthar Raza Circle, where they held black flags and placards and expressed their ire at the Congress leadership for snubbing the community.

The agitators raised slogans condemning AICC general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and KPCC president D K Shivakumar. Holding aloft banners that read 'Justice for Muslims', the protesters sought to remind the Congress of the Muslim community's unstinting support for the party over the years.

"For years, the Muslim community has helped ensure Shamanur Shivashankarappa's win in Davanagere South. The Congress had promised the byelection ticket to a Muslim candidate, but the party has betrayed the community. This time, we will pledge our support to some other party and will not vote for the Congress," said Congress functionary Mansoor Ali.

"Some of them are saying that Muslims will sell their vote for Rs 500 or Rs 1,000. Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan too has been insulted by the party. Self-respecting Muslims must not cast their vote for the Congress," Ali added.

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Two siblings drown in Tungabhadra river

HARAPANAHALLI (VIJAYANAGAR DISTRICT), DHNS: In a tragic incident, two teenage sons drowned while swimming in Tungabhadra river near Haluvagalu in the taluk, with their father watching helplessly, on Sunday evening. The deceased are M G Manu (19), a first-year BE student, and M G Prajwal (18), a II PU student. Their father Manjappa, a farmer from Haluvagalu, managed to save his youngest son Chiranjeevi from drowning.

BJP veteran Charantimath faces Meti's son in high-stakes Bagalkot battle

Constituency is witnessing 3rd byelection since 1962

SHRINIDHI R
BAGALKOT, DHNS

With the Congress finalising its candidate for the Bagalkot Assembly constituency, the stage is set for an intense contest in the upcoming by-election.

While the Bharatiya Janata Party has reposed faith in former MLA Veerabhadrayya (Veeranna) Charantimath - a three-time MLA (2004, 2008 and 2018) - the Congress, after prolonged deliberations, has finalised Umesh Meti, the younger son of former MLA H Y Meti. Umesh Meti, a political newbie, will take on the experienced Charantimath, who is in the fray for the sixth consecutive time. Being new to electoral politics, he is expected to rely heavily on the support of senior state leaders to make an impact in the bypoll.

For the Congress, a victory in this bypoll is crucial as the result will be seen as a reflection of the performance of the incumbent government. For the BJP, winning the seat will serve as a major confidence booster ahead of the 2028 Assembly elections. As a result, the bypoll is expected to draw considerable political attention across the state.

Rare distinction

The Bagalkot Assembly constituency has the rare distinction of witnessing a bypoll for the third time.

The first bypoll was held in 1962 when S Nijalingappa won the seat following a significant political development. In the February 1962 general elections, Nijalingappa - then the Congress party's chief ministerial face - lost in Hosadurga to Praja Socialist Party candidate G T Rangappa by 5,700 votes.

As Nijalingappa could not become chief minister without being a member of the Legislative

Veeranna Charantimath

Assembly, S R Kanthi, the MLA from Hungund, was sworn-in as a 'protem' chief minister in March 1962. To facilitate Nijalingappa's entry into the Assembly, the sitting Congress MLA from Bagalkot Basappa T Muranal, resigned his seat as part of a political strategy. Nijalingappa subsequently won the by-election unopposed and was sworn-in as Chief Minister of Mysore State (now Karnataka) for his third term on June 21, 1962.

The second bypoll was held in 1998 after Ajaykumar Sarnayak, who had represented the constituency since 1994, resigned after being elected to the Lok Sabha from Bagalkot in 1997. The bypoll helped the BJP open its account in the constituency, with P H Pujar defeating Congress candidate Channabasavaraj Koti by a margin of 16,731 votes.

The BJP retained the seat in 2004 with Veeranna Charantimath as its candidate.

He won again in 2008, but lost to Congress' H Y Meti in 2013. Charantimath, however, regained the seat in 2018, and again lost to Meti in 2023 by 5,848 votes. The presence of Charantimath's brother Mallikarjun Charantimath, who secured 10,116 votes, also affected the outcome. Now, with the constituency heading for its third bypoll, political activity in the region has intensified.

2.59 lakh electors

The constituency has a total of 2,59,260 voters, including 1,26,761 men and 1,32,476 women. There are 319 polling stations - 176 in rural areas and 143 in urban areas. The electorate also includes 4,188 young voters, 3,017 voters above 85 years of age, 2,633 persons with disabilities, 38 centenarians, and 391 service voters. Being the dominant community, Lingayat votes hold the sway. Kurubas, SC/STs constitute a sizeable number of voters.

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"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness".
Inserted by:
Family Members

Govt moots takeover of land gifted for schools, colleges

Educational land, from Page 1

"Existing legal frameworks do not adequately address long-standing, open and settled use of land for government educational institutions. This has left thousands of institutions vulnerable to disruption and placed State infrastructure and public investments at legal risk," the Bill notes.

The Bill seeks to coordinate with relevant departments, including those administering forest, Wakf, tribal and religious institution lands, to ensure lawful regularisation and protection of government educational institution lands.

Grievance redressal

However, the provisions in the Bill are not absolute. The Bill mandates the formation of a grievance redressal authority. The Revenue Court constituted under the Karnataka Land Revenue Act, 1964, will serve as the grievance redressal authority.

Anyone with a registered title document, or who can prove with documentary evidence that the land was never voluntarily given for government educational institution use, can file a claim within 30 days of commencement of the Act.

Further, anyone aggrieved by the authority's decision can appeal to the Karnataka Appellate Tribunal. As per the Bill, the Block Education Officer (BEO) and the Deputy Director of Pre-University Education (DDPU) are the estate officers who shall make relevant records available for inspection by other related departments.

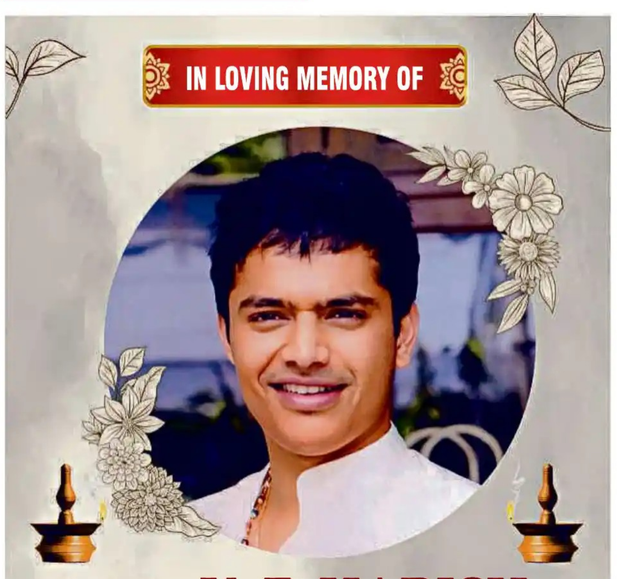
According to sources, many properties of the Education Department are now entangled in real estate disputes, since historically the best lands in prime locations have been donated for education purposes.

"Several philanthropists, especially in the aftermath of the Land Reforms movement, have provided land for education purposes. However, the department has historically not been very diligent in converting the lands to its name. These are lands vested for a particular purpose which has been utilised for that purpose but the records are not in the department's name," a source said.

Since the department is sitting on large tracts of land, land grab is being orchestrated through overt and covert "interventions," especially in Bengaluru. Through this move, the department will be more diligent, take action to protect the land and address the chain of litigation present across the state."

The source also explained that the department intends to increase the strength in government schools (through bilingual and monograde system) in a few years, when a law protecting government school land will be crucial and secure the future of public education.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



Late MR. K. E. HARISH
Born: 7-1-1990 Passed away: 8-3-2026
You are the one who carved your image like a living sculpture in our hearts.
You shone like a star in our families.
That God, without giving this star a chance to live on earth, called you back and pushed us into an ocean of grief.
You, who never knew impurity, have left a deep memory in everyone's minds and will forever remain immortal in all our hearts without fading.
Your sudden departure is very hard for us to accept.
We pray that your pure soul finds peace in heaven.
These tears of ours are our offering to you.
THE SHIVAGANARADHANE (MEMORIAL RITUAL) OF
K.E. HARISH
will be held on Monday, 23-03-2026, 7.00 pm Onwards at JRC Convention, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad-500104
GRIEVING FAMILY
Father: Mr. K.E. Prasad Mother: Mrs. K.E. Padmaja
Father-in-law : Mr. H.R. Gaviyappa, MLA, Hospet, Vijayanagara District.
Mother-in-law : Mrs H.G. Kavithamma

Digital arrest cases drop in K'taka...

Digital arrest, from Page 1

In 2024, the victims lost Rs 219 crore, an average loss of Rs 19.4 lakh per case, while in 2025, the total money lost was Rs 215 crore, an average loss of Rs 62.4 lakh per case.

With 25 cases in 2026 through February, Rs 11.57 crore was already lost, averaging a loss of Rs 46.31 lakh per case. The fact that more money is lost by the victims despite a decline in cases is proof that digital arrest is still a significant threat, according to cybercrime investigators in the state.

"The modus operandi has evolved over the last year, as the scammers are now targeting a specific segment of the population, especially the senior citizens, who are much more gullible to succumbing under threats. They are also using recent events like major bomb blasts, terror attacks and significant drug busts as a means to threaten the victims, making them believe that they were genuinely embroiled in a legal case," a senior Bengaluru police officer told *DH*.

Multiple police officers the *DH* spoke with concurred that midway in 2025, awareness campaigns towards digital arrest scams had gone into a hibernation mode, giving the fraudsters a second wind.

"The continuation of the modus operandi can also be attributed to the sudden stoppage of large-scale awareness campaigns. The intensity of the awareness efforts is very low compared to when the cases started blowing up. After the prime minister himself spoke about digital arrest scams in 2024, there was a concerted awareness effort from the Centre and the state, including warning messages before every phone call was connected, periodic text messages warning of the scam, and advertisements in the news and on social media. All that seems to have stopped now," a senior cybercrime investigator said, adding that there was an immediate need to revive the awareness programmes, especially from the Union government.

Piped gas extension to benefit 25k homes

PNG, from Page 1

No apartment complex or commercial building – coming under Bengaluru central city corporation – has been identified.

As per data, GAIL has proposed to supply PNG to large residential clusters on city's outskirts where bulk demand is high. Also, 69 commercial establishments, including restaurants, hotels and cafés, have been mapped, with a combined LPG consumption of 6,561 kg a day. Many are located on key stretches like Sarjapur Main Road, HSR Layout, JP Nagar, Malleswaram and Yelahanka, and fall within 500m of the pipeline alignment. Last year, the goverment aproved a new city gas distribution policy, which slashed pipeline installation charges from Rs 1,957 per metre to just Rs 1.

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FOURTH WEEK INTO CRISIS: PM chairs security meet; focus on fuel, fertiliser & citizen safeguards

Centre sets up task force to tackle West Asia fallout

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security to review both the protracted West Asia conflict's immediate and long-term impacts on India.

Modi directed that a group of ministers and secretaries be created to work dedicatedly in a whole-of-government approach to deal with the effects of the West Asia conflict, said an official statement issued after the CCS meeting.

"The ongoing conflict in West Asia will have significant short-, medium-, and long-term impacts on the global economy. Their effects on India were assessed and counter-measures, both immediate and long-term, were discussed," said the statement.

With no signs of the tensions easing as the war in the Persian Gulf entered its fourth week, Brent crude continues to trade at well over $109 a barrel. The government's priority is maintaining a non-disrupted supply of petroleum products, crude oil, gas, power, and fertilisers.

The prime minister said the conflict is an evolving situation and the entire world is affected in some form. In such a situation, he said, all efforts must be made to safeguard the citizens from the impact of this conflict.

Modi instructed that all arms of government should work together to ensure the least inconvenience to the citizens.

Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan gave a detailed presentation on the global situation, as well as the mitigating measures taken so far and being planned by all the concerned ministries.

An assessment of the conflict's impact on fertiliser requirement for the Kharif season also came up for discussion.

"The measures taken in the last few years to maintain adequate stocks of fertilisers will ensure timely availability and food security. Alternate sources of fertilisers were also discussed to ensure continued availability in the future," said the government.

The PM also instructed proper coordination with state governments to ensure no black-marketing and hoarding of important commodities.

Except for premium petrol, the government has, since the onset of the conflict, not increased the prices of retail petrol and diesel. Only industrial diesel prices have been hiked sharply, by around 25%.

Iran has restricted fuel supply through the Strait of Hormuz, which handles almost 20% of the global oil transport.

Women make cow dung cakes for sale in a market amid an LPG supply crisis in Prayagraj. PTI

Kashmiris collect donations for war-hit Iran

Cash, gold and copper utensils were among the things donated by people in some areas of Kashmir for the relief fund for war-hit Iran, officials said.

Expressing gratitude for the donations, the Iranian Embassy in a post on X said this act of kindness will "never be forgotten".

A day after the Eid celebrations, youth in Shia-dominated areas of the Valley on Sunday went from house to house to collect donations for those affected by the West Asia war in Iran.

They said women, in particular, have come forward and contributed generously by donating gold jewellery, copper utensils, and other valuable household items. Some families have also offered livestock.

Govt directs to expedite city gas distribution projects

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

To ease pressure on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, the Centre has instructed authorities concerned to expedite city gas distribution (CGD) projects and streamline gas distribution networks.

The Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) has directed its offices to dispose of CGD applications within 10 days. This measure aims to accelerate the rollout of piped natural gas (PNG), which serves as a reliable alternative to LPG.

Commercial LPG consumers in major cities and urban areas are being encouraged to switch to PNG as part of a long-term strategy to reduce reliance on LPG, according to an official from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Domestic LPG supply remains stable, with no reported shortages or dry-outs at distributorships. Delivery patterns are normal across the country, and most bookings are now processed through the Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) system. Panic bookings have largely subsided.

Allocations hiked

On the commercial front, the government has progressively hiked LPG allocations. An additional 20% hike in allocation was cleared on March 21, bringing the total commercial LPG allocation up to 50% of pre-crisis levels. This latest increase takes effect from March 23.

The enhanced allocation prioritises key sectors, including restaurants, dhabas, hotels, industrial canteens, food processing units, dairy operations, community kitchens, and subsidised food outlets run by state governments and local bodies. Provisions have also been made for 5 kg cylinders for migrant workers.

Around 20 states and Union Territories have implemented the revised guidelines, while public sector oil marketing companies are supplying commercial LPG in the remaining regions.

In recent days, commercial entities have lifted substantial volumes of LPG under these allocations. Educational institutions and hospitals continue to receive priority, accounting for nearly half of the total commercial LPG allocation.

Separately, the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) has raised concerns about the impact of commercial LPG shortages. The association has urged the central government to extend support across all states and recognise restaurants as an essential sector.

"The industry employs 8.2 million people — we urge the Central Government to extend this support across all states and recognise restaurants as essential," the NRAI in its post on X.

Cooking gas shortage fuels migrant exodus from Surat

SATISH JHA
AHMEDABAD, DHNS

Nilamadhab Sabat returned to Gujarat's Surat from his home in Odisha's Ganjam district on March 16 to his textile-factory job, but has been running around with his three roommates to procure a cooking-gas cylinder.

He doesn't have a regular gas connection, and hence used to buy cylinders from the open market for Rs 900-950.

However, thanks to the LPG crisis due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, Sabat is unable to get a new one. He went to refill his 5-kg cylinder, but returned after being told that a single kg of gas would cost Rs 600. "The landlord has told us categorically not to use coal for cooking. Now, I am planning to go back home," he told *DH* over the phone from Surat.

WAR SHOCKS

Sabat is not alone. Noor Mohammed, originally from Bihar's Sitamarhi district, said his gas cylinder ran empty on Friday after he had cooked for Eid festivities. The worker said he had been trying to procure a cylinder, which now costs above Rs 4,000 in the black market.

"I have six family members, and we don't have a regular gas connection. Such cylinders were easily available earlier," he said while requesting immediate help.

The West Asia conflict's impact is being felt acutely in industrial cities such as Surat, home to lakhs of migrant workers — from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and West Bengal — employed in the highly unorganised textile sector.

A rough estimate suggests that over 20 lakh workers are directly and indirectly associated with the industry.

However, a significant number of these workers, who lack gas connections due to insufficient documentation, are struggling to cook and are being forced to return home.

Railway stations crowded

Railway stations in Surat are crowded, with large numbers of migrant workers lining up to return home, largely due to the cooking gas crisis and uncertainty surrounding textile mills that are planning to cut production.

The conflict has led to a rise in crude oil prices, which has in turn increased the cost of petroleum-based yarn products such as polyester and nylon.

"It has affected the entire textile supply chain, right from garment-manufacturing to packaging and sales, while demand has also declined. Our mills, which use coal as fuel, have also been impacted as its import from Indonesia has been affected due to the conflict," said South Gujarat Textile Processors Association president Jitendra Vakharia.

Surat-based Gujarat Sangharsh Majdoor Union's general secretary Sharad Zagade told *DH*: "Most of these workers do not earn more than Rs 15,000 a month. Today, if they want to buy cooking gas, they have to pay Rs 4,000-5,000 on the black market for the same cylinders that normally cost barely Rs 1,000. Additionally, there is growing uncertainty as factories are trying to reduce production."

'Let us forgive, forget': Manipur CM after 1st meet with Kuki groups

GUWAHATI, DHNS: Hours after his first meeting with the Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) for finding a solution to the Meitei-Kuki conflict that has been raging since May 2023, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday urged all to "forgive and forget the past for a better future".

"The government's move to hold talks with the KZC is the first step to remove the trust deficit that exist between the two communities in the state. It is also a step to bridge the gap between the communities in an effort to bring peace," Singh told reporters in Manipur's capital Imphal.

"Our state is inhabited by 36 different communities, and shall remain intact. Let us forgive and forget the past for a better future," he added.

The meeting was held in Assam's Guwahati on Saturday evening; it could not be organised in strife-torn Manipur, given that the Meiteis and the Kukis are still avoiding each other's areas, fearing escalation of conflict.

Singh, however, reacted sharply to the Kuki groups' demand for a "separate administration" and maintaining the "buzzer zones".

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already announced that Manipur's territorial integrity will not be compromised. So, there is no need to speak on an issue that has already been cleared by the PM," he said.

The new CM also sought to clarify that there were no "buffer zones", as stated by the Kuki groups, but said that the government identified certain "sensitive areas".

Meanwhile, the KZC, in a statement on Sunday morning, said that the interaction was "just an ice-breaker session" and that it ended without any decision or agreement.

Elite SOG deployed in J&K's forested highlands

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

As battle-hardened Pakistani terrorists shift to dense forests and rugged mountains of Jammu and Kashmir, around 350 Special Operations Group (SOG) personnel, trained alongside elite Army units in Andhra Pradesh, have been deployed to snow-bound heights and thick forests to track militants and dismantle their support networks, officials said.

"The deployment of these specialised SOG units is part of a broader push to strengthen counter-terror operations in difficult terrain," a senior police official said.

The SOG, the J&K Police's elite anti-terror force, has undergone specialised jungle and mountain warfare training to operate in areas where conventional forces face limitations. The first batch began training nearly 10 months ago following the April 22, 2025, Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 civilians, including 25 tourists and a local, were killed.

Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat said the force has significantly recalibrated its strategy in response to evolving militant tactics. "The battle has shifted to jungles and upper reaches. We are moving upwards into these areas to get them and destroy their hideouts," Prabhat added, noting that police units are actively engaging militants in forested belts of Udhampur and Kathua districts.

Officials said the Pahalgam attack underscored the urgent need for specialised training in rugged terrain, prompting a shift towards highly mobile, terrain-adapted units. The training has now been institutionalised as a continuous process, with more SOG personnel set to be deployed in vulnerable areas after completing advanced courses.

Record 8,931 days in office: Ministers laud Modi milestone

NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, PTI

Top Union ministers on Sunday complimented Prime Minister Narendra Modi for setting a record of 8,931 days in public life, first as the Gujarat chief minister and now as the prime minister, saying this reflects his deep commitment to nation-first governance, in giving rights to the poor and enhancing the nation's pride on global platforms.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is now the longest-serving head of a government in India. Pure devotion to the nation and its people defines PM Modi ji," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said.

Union ministers, including Amit Shah, JP Nadda, Piyush Goyal, Ashwini Vaishnaw, and BJP chief Nitin Nabin, hailed the PM, saying the "Modi era" has transformed India unrecognisably in setting new landmarks in development.

Defence Minister Singh praised Modi, in a post on X, saying his life has been a continuous journey of service -- from his unwavering commitment as the Gujarat CM and his dedicated leadership as the PM.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi surpassed the 8,930-day record of former Sikkim chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling to become the longest-serving head of a government in India, on Sunday. PTI FILE

"Today, he surpasses the 8,930-day record of former Sikkim chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, achieving a historic milestone. With 8,931 days in public office as head of government, this moment reflects his deep commitment to nation-first governance, integrity in action, and tireless service to every citizen.

Shah said Modi's decades of 'seva' (service) have shaped an era of his own. "Whether it is giving the poor their rights, setting new landmarks in development or enhancing the nation's pride on global platforms, the Modi era has transformed India unrecognisably," he said in a post on X.

Shah said fostering "this new India" required a lifetime's effort and PM Modi gave it. He said serving the nation and its people without taking a holiday for more than 24 years is the manifestation of his sheer commitment.

'What did he deliver?'

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav sought to downplay Modi's record, questioning the achievements of the central government compared to the previous administration.

Yadav emphasised that the record should not be assessed by the number of days served but by the tangible improvements made in comparison to the previous government.

"Where does our Happiness Index stand now? Where does our per capita income rank globally? Where do we stand on the world stage in terms of corruption and unemployment?" Yadav asked.

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Create jobs, address education mismatch

India's economy has long been known for its inability to create jobs, and the education system for its inability to produce professionals qualified for their jobs. Though this may seem a contradiction, it is real and the country has not been able to resolve it. The *State of Working India 2026* report prepared by Azim Premji University underlines the truth of these statements by highlighting the mismatch between aspirations and realities. It says opportunities for low levels of permanent, salaried and white-collar employment among graduates are shrinking, and fewer than 7% of male graduates were able to secure a permanent salaried job within a year of graduating as of 2023. Every year, about five million graduates enter the workforce, but less than half of them find employment. Secure, well-paying jobs are more difficult to get.

The bigger picture is more unnerving. The country has 367 million young people between 15 and 29, adding up to about a third of its working population. Of this number, 263 million are outside the education system. They need jobs which they can do, unskilled, irregular or informal. But such jobs are not available. The working age population is set to rise till 2030, and decline after that. No other country has so many young people who need work and are ready to work. This demographic window, considered India's opportunity, is narrowing. Though India is projected to have a demographic advantage over other countries till 2055, it will be limited if most young people cannot find work or can only get work below their qualification. The mass of unemployed people will turn out to be a demographic burden, with economic, social and political consequences.

India can't afford to ignore anomalies in its employment and training systems

The challenge facing the nation is two-fold. It has to create jobs in all sectors and at all levels to absorb the millions entering the workforce. Economic growth has been stable but the sectors that create the most employment, such as manufacturing, have been stagnant. The challenge will turn harder with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies that reduce the human component in work. The study says educational gaps of earlier decades are being bridged and gross enrolment ratios in higher education are in line with the country's stage of development. The second challenge therefore is to focus on employability. General standards of education need to improve, vocational education needs greater priority, and initiatives such as the Skill India Mission and the Prime Minister Internship Scheme call for more effective implementation. India needs a comprehensive strategy that links education with employment.

Timely legislation to deter honour crimes

Honour killings have long been associated, in public perception, with pockets of northern India, often dismissed as a reflection of a regressive social order alien to the South. That illusion no longer holds. Karnataka's Home Minister G Parameshwara has disclosed that the state has recorded at least 15 honour killing cases between 2021 and 2025, a reminder that caste and patriarchal anxieties cut across geography. The most recent instance is the murder in Hubballi of 19-year-old Manya Patil, who married a Dalit man, by her own father and relatives. It is not an isolated incident. That such crimes persist in a state that prides itself on its progressiveness is a deep moral failure. It is also an irony that cannot be ignored: the land of Basavanna, who preached equality and the idea of *iva nammava* (he is ours), continues to witness killings in the name of exclusion. This grim reality has prompted the Siddaramaiah government to introduce the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2026, popularly called the Iva Nammava Bill. The legislation is notable for placing individual autonomy at the centre of marriage while specifically addressing honour crimes.

Nationally, too, the problem remains deeply entrenched, and official data often underestimates and differs significantly from reports by civil society and human rights organisations. Historically, states such as Uttar Pradesh account for the highest number of reported honour killings, while Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Punjab and Haryana also figure prominently. In Tamil Nadu, even when official data records "zero" cases, independent groups have documented nearly 200 incidents over a five-year period. The persistence of these killings across regions highlights a structural issue: the collision between Constitutional rights and deeply embedded social norms.

Iva Nammava Bill upholds the egalitarian ideals of Basavanna and Kuvempu

However, the real test lies not in new laws but in prosecution. No matter how progressive a law may be, it will remain symbolic if investigations are weak, trials delayed, and convictions uncertain. Swift, certain punishment is the only credible deterrent. At the same time, Karnataka must draw upon its own intellectual and moral traditions. Poet laureate Kuvempu's philosophy of *Vishwa Manava* calls for transcending caste and religious identity, envisioning a society where humanity is the primary bond. His ideal of *Sarva janangada shantiya thota*—a garden of peace for all communities—offers a powerful counterpoint to the violence of honour killings. If Karnataka is to realise this inclusive vision articulated by Basavanna and Kuvempu, it cannot remain captive to inherited prejudices. Laws can punish crimes, but only a deeper social transformation—rooted in equality, dignity and Constitutional morality—can prevent them.

UMPIRING THE UMPIRE

Speaker under scrutiny

Three episodes — 2 in state Assemblies and 1 in Lok Sabha — show the need for a debate on the design of the post

V VENKATESAN

It may have been a coincidence. Two episodes in state legislatures during the same week as the no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla brought into sharp relief the two contrasting ideas of what a Speaker is for.

On March 16, Karnataka Assembly Speaker U T Khader — a Congress appointee presiding over a Congress government — walked out of the Chair and adjourned the House because the state government had answered only 84 of the 230 questions listed for written reply that day. It was an act of institutional frustration: a Speaker signalling to the executive that the legislature's procedures are not a formality but an obligation to be discharged.

On March 11, Telangana Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar dismissed the last two disqualification petitions against BRS MLAs who had crossed over to the ruling Congress, completing 10 dismissals in stages since December 2025. The Speaker found in each case that petitioners had failed to produce conclusive evidence of defection, and delivered the final order one day before a Supreme Court contempt hearing because he had resisted acting for months.

The contrast is worth pausing on. Speaker Khader expressed his institution's disappointment with his own government in public at personal political cost. In the entire record of Om Birla's tenure — through sessions in which Question Hour was repeatedly sacrificed — there is no documented instance of the Chair expressing equivalent dissatisfaction with the executive's handling of parliamentary business.

What distinguishes the two is not party but circumstance and stakes. Khader had no anti-defection petitions to decide, no government's survival depending on his rulings. The structural test of the Speakership is whether it holds when the cost is real. Karnataka offered a glimpse. Telangana illustrated what happens when it does not.

These two state episodes frame what the no-confidence motion against Om Birla, defeated on March 11, was really about. The motion was only the fourth of its kind in independent India's history. The ruling alliance commands an overwhelming majority and its defeat was never in numerical doubt. The significance lay not in the outcome but in what the debate revealed about the state of Indian parliamentary democracy.

Productivity vs outcome

The ruling coalition's case rested largely on productivity. Amit Shah cited 118% productivity for the Budget Session of 2025. He also cited speaking-time figures: the Opposition received almost twice as much time per member as the ruling party. The implicit argument was clear: a House this productive, and this

generous to its Opposition, cannot by definition be one whose presiding officer has failed in his responsibilities.

But productivity measures output. It says nothing about whose voice was heard in producing it, or whose was not.

The specific complaints the Opposition placed on record — the suspension of 100 members from the Lok Sabha alone in December 2023, the muting of microphones, the Speaker's failure to act when a BJP member allegedly directed communal abuse at a Muslim colleague on the floor — provided documented content for a structural dissatisfaction already present.

Senior advocate Arvind Datar once compared a Speaker, who remains a member of the ruling party, to an umpire appointed by the batting side. Once elected by a ruling majority, the Speaker retains party membership, exercises quasi-judicial powers over anti-defection petitions under the Tenth Schedule, and manages the floor in ways unreviewable in the moment.

The Supreme Court addressed this structural predicament, without resolving it, in *Kihoto Hollohan vs Zachillhu* (1992). "The Robes of the Speaker do change and elevate the man inside," held Justice M N Venkatachaliah for the majority, upholding the Speaker's power to adjudicate defection petitions. The bench split 3:2.

The minority — Justices L M Sharma and J S Verma — argued that a Speaker whose tenure depended on the continuous support of the House majority could not satisfy the requirements of an independent adjudicatory authority. The Telangana Speaker's 10 clean chits, delivered under contempt pressure and timed to pre-empt the court, are the minority's reasoning rendered in operational form.

The 18th Lok Sabha is the first in a decade where the Opposition is large enough to make the Speaker's every ruling feel consequential to the balance of power: it means more competing claims on floor time, more contested admissibility rulings, and higher stakes around anti-defection petitions that can determine the survival of governments.

As Ronojoy Sen argued in *House of the People* (Cambridge, 2022), the 123% productivity of the 2015 budget session reflected a weak and fragmented Opposition as much as a well-managed House.

After the motion was defeated, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote to the Speaker describing it as a "political misdeed" driven by "personal interest and arrogance". The government's position was clear: the defeat was not an occasion for institutional reflection but for affirmation.

Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, who resigned from the Congress on assuming the Chair in 1967, remains after nearly six decades the only Speaker to have done so on his own conscience. Paragraph 5 of the Tenth Schedule permits a Speaker to resign party membership without incurring disqualification; no ruling party has ever required its nominee to invoke it.

The defeat of the motion changes none of the structural conditions that produced it. As long as the Speakership retains its present design, a House with a large and organised Opposition will periodically arrive at this point of rupture.

The question the debate raised, and which the voice vote extinguished, is whether Indian parliamentary democracy is prepared to have a serious conversation about elevating the person inside the robes of the Speaker, as the Supreme Court envisaged in 1992.

(The writer is a senior journalist based in the National Capital Region)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The charm of Nowruz in Iran

Persepolis has declined, but enough remains to evoke its ancient splendour

SURYAKUMARI DENNISON

In 1986, my husband and I were in Iran and decided to spend the week-long Nowruz vacation in Shiraz. Shortly before we left Ahvaz (the city where we lived), we visited our friends Homayun, Shadi and their mother.

It was the last Wednesday of the year, and we joined the family in the traditional 'Chahar Shambe Suri' ritual of jumping over bonfires to avert misfortune in the New Year. My husband and I leapt nimbly over the flames, hoping that the people we had grown to respect and admire would enjoy the blessing of peace.

The ongoing conflict between Iran and Iraq seemed distant in Shiraz. The gardens were breathtakingly beautiful, and we recalled the lyrical lines of the 13th-century poet Saadi: "Oh joyous and gay is the New Year's Day, and in Shiraz most of all." Saadi is acclaiming spring, which, the author Vita Sackville-West writes, "arrives most punctually to coincide with the national holiday".

On March 21, we were at Persepolis (65 km from Shiraz), once the venue of royal New Year festivities. Darius I, who reigned from 522 to 486 BCE, designed Persepolis to provide a spectacular setting for an ostentatious observance of Nowruz. Sculptures on two imposing stairways depict those scenes of splendour.

Nowruz was not only a sacred celebration for Darius but also a manifestation of majesty and might. On New Year's Day, delegations from his domains ascended the stately staircases and moved in solemn procession towards the palace. There, in the throne room, they deferentially presented their offerings of gold and silver, horses and camels to the 'King of Kings'.

That title is found on Darius's many inscriptions, but the same engravings declare that he is only king "by the grace of Ahura Mazda". Zoroastrianism had spread throughout the empire, and Darius, who staunchly adhered to that faith, is entombed in accordance with its purity laws. His resting place, just six km from Persepolis, is cut into a rock face, high above the ground, not defiling the earth. Its simplicity is in striking contrast to the grandeur of Persepolis. Of course, Persepolis no longer possesses its former magnificence. Enough survives, however, for those who are imaginatively inclined to picture its ancient glory.

The remarkable ruins are a reminder that a great ruler and his subjects joyfully greeted each New Year that they were privileged to see – New Years that dawned more than 2,500 years ago.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Turning waste into a resource can be a game changer

I refer to 'Waste-to-gas plants solution to gas shortage, garbage woes, says minister' (Mar 22). In a city like Bengaluru, converting wet waste into biogas is both timely and necessary as it addresses two major concerns: waste management and fuel shortage. However, announcements alone won't make it a reality. Segregation at source with active citizen involvement can transform this persistent urban problem into a sustainable opportunity. Consistent and transparent implementation, supported by long-term commitment and civic responsibility, can make this initiative effective. The state government and citizen groups must take the idea forward and set a model for other cities to follow.
Deepika Priya K, Bengaluru

Water governance

Apropos 'When water wars shape livelihoods' (Mar 21), transboundary water conflicts are increasingly affecting livelihoods, particularly in Southeast Asia. Rising demand, climate change, and dam construction disrupt farming and fisheries, reducing incomes and forcing migration. These impacts weaken vulnerable communities and create long-term social and economic problems. Effective policies must ensure fair water governance, protect workers, and provide social support.
Keziah Susan Kurian, Bengaluru

Acts of kindness

Kudos to the Hubballi philanthropist who has been feeding 1,000-1,500 people daily, free of cost, for the past five days, amid the LP gas shortage. This humanitarian gesture deserves recognition and reward from authorities and voluntary organisations. Such initiatives offer hope to those dependent on affordable food and should be encouraged.
A K Shariff, Mysuru

Cost of water crisis

With 70% of India's groundwater contaminated, packaged water is a survival necessity, not a luxury. However, the Iran crisis has exposed our extreme vulnerability to global shocks. Despite the government's proactive tax cut from 18% to 5%, soaring petroleum-linked costs have erased all consumer benefits. PET preform prices have jumped from Rs 110 to Rs 190 per kg, while shrink film costs surged by over 100%. With summer demand expected to rise by 20%, the government must intervene beyond taxation. The administration's failure to stabilise essential supply chains is inexcusable. We need temporary price caps on essential water and subsidies for non-petroleum packaging to shield the public. Ultimately, fast-tracking clean public water infrastructure is the only permanent defence against such volatile imported inflation.
Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Now with the death of Iran, the greatest enemy America has is the radical Left, highly incompetent Democratic Party...
Donald Trump, US President

Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own unguarded thoughts.
Buddha

TO BE PRECISE

IN PERSPECTIVE

China's blueprint for the next leap

Political oversight has tightened under Xi Jinping, continuing to drive China's rise

AMIT KUMAR

China's economic and technological success continues to stoke a sense of awe and envy. Its indomitable presence in global manufacturing is perplexing. Its share of global manufacturing output by value is slated to increase from around 30% currently to 45% by 2030. Even more impressive is China's takeover of new-age industries, especially EVs, solar, and batteries.

For China, achieving scientific and technological self-reliance in core technologies — integrated circuits, industrial machine tools, high-end equipment, basic software, advanced materials and biomanufacturing — is a key priority. There are also upcoming segments China seeks to dominate. The 15th Five-Year Plan instructs China to sustain its lead in 'emerging and strategic' industries such as new energy, new materials, aviation and aerospace, and the low-altitude economy, while establishing dominance in 'industries of the future', including quantum technology, biomanufacturing, hydrogen and nuclear fusion power, brain-computer interfaces, embodied artificial intelligence and 6G mobile communications.

China's successes in strategically important industries have inflated concerns around similar triumphs in upcoming sectors. Amid growing belligerence, countries increasingly wonder: will China's plans to conquer these frontiers succeed even as it becomes gradually secluded from the Western innovation ecosystem?

Tricks up its sleeve

The Chinese system has certain strengths it can rely on. Its governing model — widely credited for past successes — continues to inspire confidence in its ability to deliver future outcomes.

But what does this model entail? Some describe it as a top-down, centralised governance structure, while others point to its decentralised spirit that enables quality at scale. Both views hold merit. What stands out is how a system that is centralised at its core still combines features of a decentralised polity to ensure delivery and performance.

China's highly centralised government machinery ensures that once strategic goals are set, the central leadership enforces strict adherence across all levels of government — from provinces to townships. This is achieved through political and fiscal oversight.

Political oversight is maintained through the appointment of a party secretary at each level of local government. These secretaries, appointed by superior party committees, submit periodic reports upward, creating a feedback chain reaching the central leadership. Under President Xi Jinping, this oversight has become more stringent. Unfavourable reviews often trigger disciplinary action, including inquiry and dismissal.

If failure to adhere to party directives risks dismissal, compliance improves promotion prospects. This carrot-and-stick approach fosters both fear and competition among local governments.

Fiscal oversight reinforces this system. For over three decades, the central leadership has exercised tight control over local finances. While local governments account for around 85% of national general budget expenditure, they receive just over 50% of revenue, creating a persistent shortfall. This dependence has intensified after the property sector crisis.

Competition among local governments for transfer payments and subsidies enforces alignment with central priorities. The party's control over financial institutions further strengthens this mechanism, as projects aligned with central directives enjoy easier access to credit. These levers enhance the centre's ability to guide local investment decisions.

At the same time, this centralised structure incorporates a decentralised dynamic — competition among local governments to outperform peers. While this often leads to duplication and overcapacity, it also drives process innovation and enables quality at scale.

China's vast pool of investable capital is another critical strength. Its investment-heavy model allows it to sustain levels comparable to the combined investment of the US and Germany. High savings and subdued consumption ensure a steady supply of excess capital for deployment.

China's system allows the state — rather than the market — to direct capital into strategically important sectors, enabling a focused and coordinated approach. However, this also raises the risk of wasteful expenditure. The leadership attempts to mitigate this by prioritising technologies that can be rapidly commercialised and scaled. Finally, China's manufacturing workforce provides it with an enduring advantage. At the turn of the century, China boasted a manufacturing workforce of 110 million. In 2024, it continues to host above 104 million. India (63 million) and the US (12.5 million) trail behind.

Sustaining a 100 million-plus workforce for over a quarter century has enabled massive diffusion of talent and the development of transferable skills across sectors. This helps explain why scaling and building from scratch are far easier in China than elsewhere.

China is not only set to retain this advantage but is also augmenting it through automation. It now accounts for over 50% of global industrial robot installations and operates the largest fleet of industrial robots (2,207K), ahead of Japan (450K) and South Korea (350K). These factors collectively give China a formidable edge. Whether the West and others can mount a challenge will depend on their ability to pool resources and distribute costs effectively.

(The writer is a researcher with the Takshashila Institution)

'By constantly platforming sex offenders, political parties embolden more men'

Silence has long been the primary currency of survival in the echo chamber of the film industry. To speak is to risk everything; to name names is to invite an exile that few can endure. But renowned playback singer and voice artist Chinmayi Sripada has stood apart among many. Nearly eight years after spearheading the #MeToo movement in the Tamil film industry, Chinmayi finds herself in a familiar, albeit more isolated, position again.

She is in the eye of the storm after calling out legendary actors Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan for their posts congratulating Tamil writer and lyricist R Vairamuthu for winning the Jnanpith Award. Vairamuthu has been accused of sexual misconduct by 17 women, including Chinmayi. Having faced a shadow-ban by Kollywood for calling out Vairamuthu, Chinmayi sees the literary honour for him as a systemic signal that testimony of survivors remains secondary to the status of powerful men. Excerpts:

Chinmayi Sripada, *playback singer and voice artist, in conversation with* **Giridhar Narayan**

THE DEEP TAKE

● When the nation's highest literary honour is bestowed on an individual facing at least 17 public allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct, what does it say about the value the State places on the safety and testimony of women?

I have observed that not only are victims of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and aggravated sexual assault becoming younger, but so are the perpetrators. This trend is alarming. In a society which raises its women in saying, 'Just brush this off and keep walking', this systemic change does not happen overnight. It happens because children continue to see that adults will get away with something like this... There are no moral questions, ethical questions, criminal questions, or legally valid questions asked of them. However, all of those questions somehow rest on the survivor or the dead victim's family. This very systemic change and political parties not taking a stand and constantly platforming and working with sex offenders... embolden more men.

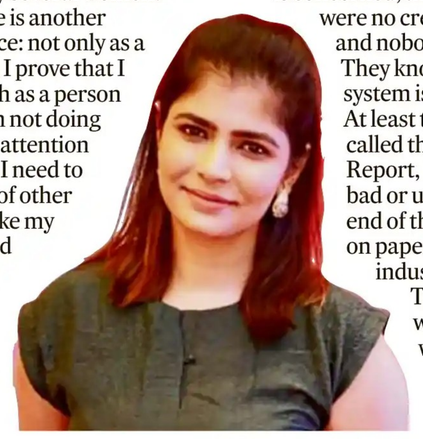
● You were particularly sharp in your critique of Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth for their congratulatory posts. Why do you believe men in power in cinema like them chose to 'stand by their bros' rather than acknowledge the trauma of the survivors?

I wish I had an answer. I want to understand how it works in their minds. The reason why I spoke up about both Rajini sir and Kamal sir is because not only are they legends and right now the senior-most pillars of Tamil cinema, both of them have had political ambitions... and one of them is a Rajya Sabha member. I asked them this question because as people who have come from cinema and segued into politics, you have not attempted to do or set any safeguards in place in the very industry and your own home ground. And you come out and speak about safety for women. How am I supposed to take you seriously?

Scan to read the full interview

● Many argue that a literary award should only judge the work. Why do you believe this distinction is a 'luxury' that ignores the power and platform such awards grant to individuals who have allegedly abused their positions?

The entire Tamil literary community has risen up in protest, saying that Vairamuthu does not deserve the award because his literary work, according to them, is not deserving of the Jnanpith. The other point is, they keep saying to separate the art from the artist, but why didn't they do it in my case? The argument was, 'Oh, she has accused someone in power, so let's punish her. Make an example out of her and say if you speak up, this is what will happen to you'. How does the rule suddenly become very different for the man accused of the crime, not just by one, but by several women? There is another nuance: not only as a survivor should I prove that I am good enough as a person in my talent. I'm not doing this for fame or attention or money. Plus, I need to have a number of other survivors to make my complaint sound valid. I am only one of 17. I kept asking what about the other 16? Why can't you speak about the others?



● While the Hema Committee Report that looked into sexual harassment and exploitation in the Malayalam film industry initially sparked a wave of hope, many of the resulting cases were recently closed due to a 'lack of cooperation'. Do you feel the Tamil film industry has used this as an excuse to avoid an independent audit?

As far as the Hema Committee Report is concerned, they keep saying there were no credible complainants and nobody came forward. They know that because the system is stacked against us. At least there is something called the Hema Committee Report, however good or bad or useless it was at the end of the day, that exists on paper for the Kerala film industry... I think the Tamil film industry will fall over backwards to make sure something like that report never ever happens here.

In many companies, employees compete on leaderboards to show how much AI they are using. They are racking up big bills along the way

More! Tech workers max out their AI use

KEVIN ROOSE

An engineer at OpenAI processed 210 billion "tokens"—enough text to fill Wikipedia 33 times—through the company's artificial intelligence models over the last week, the most of any employee.

At Anthropic, a single user of the company's AI coding system, Claude Code, racked up a bill of more than $150,000 in a month.

And at tech companies like Meta and Shopify, managers have started to factor AI use into performance reviews, rewarding workers who make heavy use of AI tools and chastening those who don't.

This is the new reality for coders, some of the first white-collar workers to feel the effects of AI as it sweeps through the economy. AI was supposed to help tech companies boost productivity and cut costs. But it has also created an expensive new status game, known as "tokenmaxxing," among AI-obsessed workers who are desperate to prove how productive they are.

At some tech companies, including Meta and OpenAI, employees compete on internal leaderboards that show how many tokens — the atomic unit of AI use, roughly equivalent to a word fragment — each worker consumes, two people familiar with those companies' practices said. Generous "token budgets" are becoming a job perk for coders, like dental insurance or free lunch, and some are spending thousands of dollars a month trying to automate as much of their own work as possible.

"I probably spend more than my salary on Claude," said Max Linder, a software engineer in Stockholm. (Linder's employer pays for his tokens.)

Until recently, power users might have consumed thousands of tokens a day using an AI tool like ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini. A student writing an essay, for example, may go through 10,000 tokens—roughly equivalent to 7,500 words — including several rounds of revisions. Using millions of tokens would require hours in front of a computer, doing nothing but typing, and using billions of tokens was virtually impossible.

But the advent of so-called agentic coding tools has upped the ante. These systems can work unsupervised for hours at a time, reviewing and editing large code bases and writing entire software programs from a single prompt. Each agent can spawn subagents to handle different parts of a task, generating thousands of tokens at each step. Some AI systems, like the popular open-source AI assistant OpenClaw, are designed to run 24/7, churning through tokens while their human users sleep.

"If you have some continuously running agents, you'll do 700 million tokens a week from a single full-time agent," said Ege Erdil, a co-founder of Mechanize, an AI startup, who estimated his own token consumption at between one billion and ten billion a week. "It doesn't really take that much."

All of that adds up for the AI companies selling the tokens. Anthropic more than doubled its revenue projections in two months this year, largely because of the breakneck growth of its agentic coding tools. OpenAI recently said that its agentic coding tool, Codex, had tripled its weekly active users since the start of the year, and that overall Codex use, measured in tokens, had increased fivefold. Last year, Google said its AI models processed more than 1.3 quadrillion tokens a month.

NYT

Even for the most dedicated programmers, using billions of tokens isn't easy. For comparison: I went through a period of heavy Claude Code use earlier this year, working on several separate coding projects for four or five hours a day, and managed to use only a few million tokens. (Rookie numbers, really.) But some coders have mastered the art of AI multitasking, opening multiple windows and setting dozens of agents loose on their projects at a time.

AI companies have encouraged these whales, giving them trophies and other rewards. And some tech executives are glad to see their employees embracing the new tools. They equate heavy AI use with increased productivity—if a programmer wants to operate a swarm of 10 AI agents, running parallel tasks in separate windows, they're happy to foot the bill.

But I spoke to several tech workers who worried that their colleagues are gorging on billions of tokens—which can cost thousands of dollars a day—for what amount to bragging rights. Even at the AI labs, where workers are given unlimited use of their companies' tools, the idea that all of this is productive seems far-fetched.

"It doesn't seem sustainable," said one OpenAI employee, who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorised to discuss his colleagues' AI coding addictions.

Subscribers to paid Claude and ChatGPT plans typically pay a monthly fee, which gives them a fixed number of tokens. (The number varies; some tokens are "cached," meaning the system has stored them in memory and doesn't need to generate them from scratch, and companies charge more for "output" tokens than "input" tokens.) Users who need more tokens can pay for them separately or upgrade to a more expensive plan.

Shopify said in a statement that token use is just one measure of how the company measures performance. It also looks at how AI "improves and amplifies" work. Anthropic, Meta and OpenAI declined to comment for this column. (*The New York Times* has sued OpenAI and Microsoft, claiming copyright infringement of news content related to AI systems. The two companies have denied the suit's claims.)

I talked to several other tokenmaxxers about what they're doing with all those tokens. Most were engineers or hobby programmers who were building and maintaining large, complex pieces of software using coding agents running in parallel.

They said, by and large, that AI coding tools were making them more productive. But some also framed their use of AI as a strategic move — a way to signal, to their colleagues and bosses, that they're keeping up with the times, as the era of human coding appears to be coming to an end.

If we really are on the cusp of a white-collar job apocalypse, maybe token anxiety is rational. You don't want to be the last programmer writing code by hand, without teams of AI agents working around the clock on your behalf. And employers, who are paying for all of these anxious tokens, may see it as a worthwhile expense to stay ahead of the curve.

Gergely Orosz, who writes a popular newsletter for software engineers, defended the practice of assessing workers through AI leaderboards, calling it "a supercheap way to learn about new and interesting ways of working." The metrics that managers used to track programmers' productivity before AI—such as how many lines of code they wrote or how many code changes they submitted — weren't perfect, either, he added. And for workers at the most AI-enthusiastic companies, Orosz said, the incentives are clear.

"Inside large tech companies, it's becoming a career risk to not use AI at an accelerated pace, regardless of output quality," he wrote.

Ah, yes, output quality. The leaderboards don't measure that, which raises the obvious question: Are any of these tokenmaxxers producing anything good? Or are they merely spinning their wheels, churning out useless code (and wasting valuable processing power) in an attempt to look busy?

Time will tell. Maybe the AI addicts of today will be the 100x engineers of tomorrow. Or perhaps it's just productivity theatre—a glimmering tower of tokens, constructed by the competitive and fearful, that will topple as soon as we understand what really makes for useful work.

Either way, we're going to need a lot more data centres.

The New York Times

Rule of law fails in custody

ANIKETAN SUVVI

'Custodial torture is a naked violation of human dignity and degradation which destroys, to a very large extent, the individual personality,' observed the Supreme Court in *D K Basu vs State of West Bengal*. The recent report of an alleged custodial death in Tumakuru, Karnataka, is a disturbing reflection of systemic failure, raising concerns of a constitutional crisis rather than merely a law-and-order issue. That such an incident has occurred in the home district of the state's home minister makes it even more unsettling, exposing the gap between responsibility and reality.

In a democratic country like India, which calls itself a welfare state, the Constitution guarantees dignity, liberty, and freedom to every individual. Incidents of custodial torture or death strike at the very idea of justice. While the police are entrusted with maintaining law and order, it is the judiciary that determines guilt or innocence. The police have no authority to take life or subject a person to inhumane treatment. Such acts mock the justice system. When those tasked with enforcing the law violate it, a troubling question arises: are we drifting from a welfare state to a police state?

Despite staggering figures of custodial torture and deaths, convictions of police personnel remain rare. The persistence of custodial violence, despite repeated exposure, is deeply troubling. One reason is the enduring colonial policing mindset, where coercion is seen as a legitimate investigative tool rather than an illegal act. Pressure to solve cases quickly only aggravates the problem. Shortcuts become routine, and human rights are treated as hindrances rather than guiding principles.

The judiciary has consistently taken a strong stand against custodial violence and laid down safeguards. In *D K Basu vs State of West Bengal*, the Supreme Court prescribed detailed procedures for arrest and detention. In *Nilabati Behera vs State of Orissa*, it recognised compensation for victims of custodial death, affirming State accountability. In *Paramvir Singh Saini vs Baljit Singh*, it directed the installation of CCTV cameras in police stations to ensure transparency. However, compliance on the ground remains weak, exposing serious administrative failures.

Legally, India does have a framework to protect individuals from custodial torture. Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, now expanded to include the right to live with dignity and freedom from torture. Article 20(3) protects against self-incrimination, while Article 22 ensures safeguards during arrest and detention. Together, these provisions make it clear that no person can be subjected to inhuman treatment by the State. The problem lies not in the absence of law, but in its ineffective implementation.

Though India signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture (1997), it remains unratified. This prolonged inaction shows a lack of commitment to criminalising custodial violence in line with international standards. Many countries have enacted specific anti-torture laws and established independent monitoring mechanisms. India, by contrast, continues to rely on general provisions that are inadequate to meet the scale of the problem.

Custodial torture is a direct assault on constitutional morality, not merely a legal violation. The Constitution envisions a welfare state that prioritises dignity and well-being. When authority is exercised without accountability, it erodes public trust and makes democracy weaker. Accountability must be strict and uncompromising; it must extend to all officers directly or indirectly involved, including senior police officials.

What is needed is not condemnation, but structural reform. Long-pending police reforms, recommended by committees and the Supreme Court, must be implemented in letter and spirit. India needs a dedicated anti-torture law that clearly defines and penalises custodial violence. Police personnel must be equipped with scientific and rights-based investigation techniques so that coercion or force is eliminated. Importantly, technological measures such as CCTV must be fully operational and monitored to ensure transparency.

The Preamble promises justice, liberty, equality, and dignity to every individual – these are not merely words but a promise by the State. India is, and must remain, a welfare state, not a police state. Incidents like custodial torture are a direct threat to the rule of law itself.

(The writer is an advocate based in Bengaluru and is the author of Legal Personalities: Life & Lessons)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MARCH 1976

Price stability will be maintained: Pranab

New Delhi, March 22
Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Minister for Revenue and Banking, today held out the hope that it would be possible to maintain the present price stability in the coming year "unless certain extraneous elements come into the picture." Intervening in the general debate on the budget in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Mukherjee said the state of economy as it existed today would make it possible for them to fulfil the expectations expressed by the Finance Minister in his budget speech.

25 YEARS AGO: MARCH 2001

Tehelka to identify bribe taker

New Delhi, Mar 22 (PTI)
News portal *Tehelka* today promised to soon identify the person who allegedly took Rs 2 lakh from its reporters posing as arms dealers in the presence of former Samata Party President Jaya Jaitly reportedly at the residence of former Defence Minister George Fernandes. Reacting to the Samata Party's claim that no money was paid to the party by *Tehelka* and the party was a victim of a "bundle of lies" unleashed by the news portal, *Tehelka* Editor-in-Chief Tarun Tejpal said "by tonight or tomorrow we will know who the person is."

OASIS | MIRLE KARTHIK

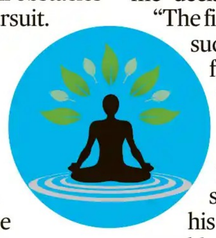
Diversity of devotees

The *Bhagavad Gita*, in its seventh chapter classifies devotees into four categories. The first group comprises of those who turn to the Lord in times of trouble or distress, seeking deliverance from their afflictions.

They are the *Aartis*, who in normal times, are so engrossed in their worldly affairs that they neither have the time nor inclination to engage in spiritual pursuits. The majority of mankind falls into this group.

The second category comprises of the *Jignasus*- those with an ardent desire to emancipate their lives through spiritual engagements and knowledge acquisition.

The third group, the most common, the *Arthartis* – those seeking fulfillment of their wants and desires and who turn to the divine for removal of all obstacles and impediments in their pursuit.



The fourth and last comprises of the *Gnanis* – the realized ones who have already reached a high point in their spiritual journey, but who relentlessly march ahead to touch the pinnacle, the supreme *Atman* or divine presence.

Thus we see a clear demarcation of innate natures and predilections, each acting as impelled by their *Vasanas* or behavioural traits acquired over many previous births. "All these four are my devotees undoubtedly, but the last, the *Gnani* is the most dear to me" declares Lord Krishna. Why?

"The first three also turn to me for succour, for their well being and for achieving their worldly wants. But he, the *Gnani* does not have any desire in his heart. His is *Ekabhakti* – one pointed devotion, always seeking only one thing – that his mind not be lead astray by the world and that he may attain to me and enshrine me in his heart and never be separated from me. Thus he is dear to me and I am dear to him. With such a purified mind, he becomes the very embodiment of myself, the exemplar of true divinity," says Lord Krishna.

Revered Swami Chinmayananda gives an eloquent example of friendship with a minister. True, such closeness brings with it many benefits. (The first three categories). But becoming a minister oneself means unrestricted freedom and power. A *Gnani* is like this, with access to the highest seat of power. But, the *Gita* tellingly declares, reaching such an exalted state takes countless births and efforts. To realise that this universe is a manifestation of the supreme needs immense efforts over many lives. "Strive towards this, irrespective of where you are" is the message here.

CPM and LDF know very well that people's sentiments are against them and are applying their last trick. CPM-BJP friendship is not new in Kerala

DH DECCAN HERALD

Political Theatre

And now, with elections approaching once again, the 'setting' has already begun – determining which official will be set where

DECCAN HERALD
Monday
March 23, 2026

Poll vault

Musical baton

As P J Joseph, a veteran leader of the Kerala Congress, steps away from decades-long electoral politics and hands over the baton to his son Apu John Joseph, music lovers might have wondered if the campaign's familiar tunes would fade. Joseph, a known music enthusiast, often sang during his election trail. His son, however, hasn't disappointed. Apu, making his electoral debut from his father's bastion of Thodupuzha in Idukki, recently rendered the popular "Mere Sapnon Ki Rani" from the Hindi film *Aradhana*. The song appears to be a favourite—he has performed it on earlier occasions as well—and he has even released a music album in the past. An engineer by profession, Apu has worked in India and abroad for several years before entering active politics.

ARJUN RAGHUNATH, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Loyalty test

Pradyut Bordoloi, a Lok Sabha member from Nagaon in Assam who was elected twice on a Congress ticket, switched to the BJP on March 19, dealing a blow to the grand old party ahead of the Assembly elections. His son, Prateek, who had been named the Congress candidate from Margherita, chose to remain with the party. While he withdrew his candidature, he did not resign from the Congress. Young Prateek, who was set to make his Assembly poll debut, said his decision was guided by his respect for and commitment to the values and discipline of the Congress party. Pradyut had represented Margherita in the Assembly four times between 1998 and 2011, before losing to BJP's Bhaskar Sharma in 2016. He was later elected to the Lok Sabha from Nagaon in 2019 and again in 2024.

SUMIR KARMAKAR, GUWAHATI

Meet the leader

Rajeev Chandrasekhar
Nemom, Thiruvananthapuram

The Nemom constituency in Thiruvananthapuram is drawing much attention in the Kerala Assembly elections, not only because the BJP hopes to reclaim its maiden seat there, but also due to its high-profile candidate, technocrat-turned-politician Rajeev Chandrasekhar.

Chandrasekhar is on a mission not just to reopen the saffron party's account in Kerala, but to position the BJP as a decisive force in the 140-member Assembly.

He announced his candidacy in Nemom soon after the BJP came to power in the Thiruvananthapuram city corporation for the first time in December 2025. BJP's O Rajagopal won the seat in 2016, but the party failed to retain it in the 2021 election.

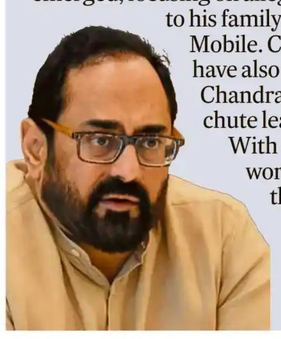
Chandrasekhar lost to Congress leader Shashi Tharoor in his maiden electoral battle in Thiruvananthapuram during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, but gave a tough fight by reducing Tharoor's victory margin to 16,077 — down from 99,989 in 2019 — despite having no prior political experience in Kerala.

That performance helped pave the way for his elevation as the BJP's Kerala president last year. Although he has roots in Kerala, Chandrasekhar was settled in Bengaluru, became a Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka, and also served as Minister of State for Electronics and IT.

Despite hurdles such as his lack of fluency in Malayalam, Chandrasekhar managed to consolidate control over a party facing intense factionalism. His direct links with the BJP's top brass in Delhi also helped him.

As Chandrasekhar enters the electoral fray by projecting the BJP's development agenda, his supporters are also highlighting his entrepreneurial profile to boost his image.

However, a counter-campaign has emerged, focusing on allegations related to his family business, BPL Mobile. Congress camps have also sought to frame Chandrasekhar as a 'parachute leader'.



With declared assets worth over Rs 93 crore, the 61-year-old Chandrasekhar will be among the richest candidates in Kerala.

How a Left-Cong tie-up, or its absence, shapes TMC's prospects in Bengal

So far, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has left little room for other I.N.D.I.A-bloc partners

SUMIT PANDE

By declaring candidates for all but three seats, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has primed itself for a four-cornered contest for the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls, as Mamata Banerjee's party aims to consolidate minority votes that influence the outcome in more than a third of the total seats.

The TMC has released its list of 291 candidates, leaving three seats for its junior ally in the Darjeeling hills. The Bengal CM's message is abundantly clear: She considers her party the strongest force to challenge the BJP in West Bengal, leaving little room for other I.N.D.I.A-bloc partners.

For a party born out of the struggle that ended the 34-year Left Front rule in West Bengal, there is little room for an adjustment between the TMC and the CPM. An alliance with the Congress could have been an option, but the TMC has been inclined to go solo, though it took Congress support to dislodge the Left in 2011. A year later, Banerjee snapped ties with the Congress in the state, but remained part of the UPA at the Centre.

The TMC's positioning can be better understood from the impact of pre-poll tie-ups in Bengal's electoral politics.

WEST BENGAL
Assembly Poll

Scenario 1: The Left and the Congress have a pre-poll alliance. There is a historic picture of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former West Bengal CM and CPM veteran Buddhadeb Bhattacharya sharing the stage for a pre-poll tie-up in 2016. The alliance polled close to 35% of the votes against the TMC's 45%.

This is the least favourable option for the TMC. Though it would want to emerge as the single-largest party, it would prefer to avoid a strong Left-Congress alternative, which could steal its Muslim voters in the future, especially in pockets where the Congress is traditionally strong, like the Malda-Murshidabad belt. While the BJP remains a strong challenger, its political constituency does not overlap with the TMC.

Scenario 2: The Left and the Congress having an informal arrangement suits the TMC better, as it helps it consolidate minority votes. It played out in the 2021 Assembly elections.

For the Congress, however, any pre-poll tie-up with the Left in Bengal seems to have had a spillover effect in Kerala, where the CPM-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF are pitched against one another.

The Kerala and Bengal Assemblies' terms run concurrently. In 2021, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan bucked the trend to lead the LDF to a second consecutive victory in the state. The loss, entirely, was that of the Congress.

Scenario 3: The Left and the Congress fight separately. This translates to a quadrangular contest, with the TMC emerging as the most credible force for anti-BJP voters.

The only flip side to this arrangement is the possibility that a section of the Left could tactically switch to the BJP if they feel the CPM and its allies are not in serious contention.

As for the Congress, the party — after experimenting with both formal and informal tie-ups with the Left — seems to have conceded more space to the TMC since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

First, it replaced Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, a known Mamata critic and five-time party Congress MP from Baharampur who lost the 2024 LS polls, as the state chief with the relatively-unknown Subhankar Sarkar.

The Congress top leadership has hardly visited Bengal in the last two years, leaving the field open for the TMC.

But the question is, will the TMC reciprocate the Congress' concessions in kind? In the past, Banerjee did not refrain from queering the pitch in states like Goa, where the Congress is locked in a direct contest against the BJP.

CPM candidate from Nabadwip Assembly constituency Swarnendu Sinha campaigns in Nadia on Sunday. PTI

Will help disenfranchised voters: WB CM

KOLKATA, DHNS: With the Election Commission set to publish a supplementary electoral roll for West Bengal on Monday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said her party would help disenfranchised people appeal before the 19 tribunals that the poll panel recently set up following a Supreme Court order.

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo was addressing the party's workers in the Bhabanipur Assembly constituency in Kolkata on Sunday.

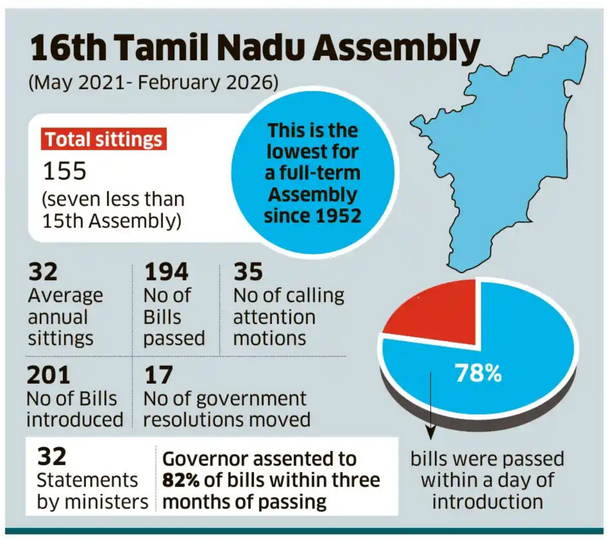
TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee asked party workers to ensure the CM's victory by a margin larger than in the 2021 elections.

He said Mamata had won in 231 of the 287 polling booths in 2021 and, this time, the party workers would have to ensure her victory in at least 232 booths.

DMK promise fizzles: TN Assembly meets least since 1952

Number of sittings in full-term Assembly halved, shows analysis

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS



While releasing the party manifesto for the 2021 Assembly elections, DMK president M K Stalin had promised to take steps to convene the Tamil Nadu Assembly for at least 100 days a year after accusing the then-AIADMK government of not spending enough days discussing people's problems in the House.

TAMIL NADU
Assembly Poll

Five years later, the 16th Assembly, in which Stalin is the chief minister, ended up meeting only for 155 days — the lowest for a full-term Assembly since 1952, when the first general elections were held in independent India, according to a detailed analysis by PRS Legislative Research.

The 16th Assembly recorded many other lows, with the Discussion on Department Expenditure after the Budget being held for only 17 days, two fewer than in the 15th Assembly, five less than in the 14th, and eight fewer than in the 13th.

However, Speaker M Appavu said in February that the House convened for 161 days during this term. Even if one goes by those figures — the presiding officer must have counted the days when the House was adjourned immediately after reading obituary references — the figure was one day less than the 162 sittings during the 15th Assembly (2016-2021).

The analysis shows a steady decline in the number of sittings from the first Assembly (314), with the average annual sittings halved.

The number of statements by ministers in the House was a mere 32 in the 16th Assembly; it peaked in the previous two terms: 185 in 2011-2016 and 177 in 2016-2021. Only 35 calling-attention motions were taken up this term, against 70 during the 15th Assembly.

The PRS analysis said of the 16th Assembly: "It met for 32 days on average. Assembly sittings have lasted five hours per day on average."

However, the 16th Assembly saw the introduction of 201 Bills, of which 194 were passed, while none were referred to a committee, an improvement from 183 Bills during the 15th Assembly.

A whopping 78% of the Bills were passed within a day of introduction, hinting that enough time was not allotted for discussion. As many as 19 were passed on September 13, 2021.

During the 16th Assembly, which saw Governor R N Ravi walking out of the House in 2023, 2024, 2025, and 2026, as many as 82% of the Bills received assent within three months of passing, while nine got nods more than a year after passing, including six following an SC judgement of April 2025.

Jayaram Venkatesan, convenor of Chennai-based NGO Arappor Iyakkam, termed the development as "direct stifling" of the democratic rights of people who elect politicians to be their voice in the Assembly.

'Suraksha' is Assam's buzzword this poll season

SUMIR KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI, DHNS

Suraksha, or protection, has emerged as the common word anchoring the campaign narratives of both the ruling BJP and the Opposition Congress in Assam, as they prepare to lock horns in the single-phase Assembly elections on April 9.

From wall posters to LED billboards and YouTube theme songs, the two arch rivals in Indian politics are invoking suraksha to frame contrasting visions of Assam's identity — an issue that has dominated the state's politics since the 1980s.

ASSAM
Assembly Poll

Led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the BJP is seeking a third consecutive term, promising protection for Sanatani Hindus and indigenous communities. The Congress, meanwhile, says that true protection lies in "restoring Bor Axom", an inclusive, secular Greater Assam.

"In the last 10 years in power, the BJP has taken bold steps, from eviction drives against infiltrators to pushing illegal migrants back into Bangladesh. The party has also moved to implement clauses of the Assam Accord, a promise Congress made to the people way back in 1985 but never fulfilled," said Dipjyoti Parashar, a BJP worker in Guwahati's Hengrabari area.

Parashar stressed that the BJP has laid the foundation for securing Assam and its people against the threat of "Bangladeshi Muslims" and said that the party needs to remain in power for at least another decade.

Himanta Biswa Sarma

"Himanta Biswa Sarma's government has freed 1.5 lakh bigha of land from infiltrators so far. Give us a mandate for another five years, and not just in Assam, we will search out and remove infiltrators across the country," Union Home Minister Amit Shah said in Guwahati on March 15.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi alleges that in the name of fighting infiltrators, the BJP and CM Sarma are dividing people along religious lines and resorting to atrocities merely to win votes.

The major contest is set to be between two alliances, led by the BJP and the Congress, while attention will also be on the fate of the Badruddin Ajmal-led AIUDF, which is contesting the polls alone after a long gap. The BJP has renewed its alliance with the AGP and reinducted the Bodoland People's Front (BPF).

The Congress has joined hands with Raijor Dal and the Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP). The Congress has also distanced itself from the AIUDF, aiming to shed its image of being pro-Muslim.

POLL PLATTER

In Palakkad, biryani spices up triangular fight

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

Amid the tight triangular contest for the Palakkad Assembly seat in Kerala, it may come as no surprise if biryani steals the show.

The CPM-led Left Democratic Front's surprise candidate is a hotelier who runs the popular NMR Biriyani House in Palakkad. LDF nominee NMR Razak is a leading member of the family behind the outlets famed for their signature 'Rawther biryani'.

NMR Razak

BJP's firebrand leader Sobha Surendran, who is pinning high hopes on winning a seat where the party has been runner-up in the last three elections, now faces not just the challenge of biryani fame but also celebrity clout. The Congress-led United Democratic Front has fielded actor and stand-up comedian Ramesh Pisharody, a Palakkad native.

Soon after the CPM announced Razak as its party-backed independent candidate, the NMR Biriyani House began drawing wider attention.

It was in 2009-10 that Razak and his brothers started the biryani house, built around their mother's recipe as its highlight. Rawther biryani traces its roots to neighbouring parts of Tamil Nadu, such as Pollachi.

NMR Biriyani House, which now has four outlets in Palakkad, is a favourite haunt of food vloggers. The menu features mutton, chicken and beef biryani, along with other dishes.

In the 2021 elections, the Palakkad constituency drew much attention when 'Metro Man' E Sreedharan contested as the BJP candidate. He lost to Congress' Shafi Parambil by just 3,859 votes.

In 2016, Sobha Surendran contested from Palakkad and lifted the BJP to second place, pushing the LDF to third, though she lost to Parambil by 17,483 votes.

West Asia tensions likely to ripple through Kerala polls

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

The prolonged West Asia crisis is likely to have its repercussions in the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections.

While scores of Malayali NRIs who used to come down during the election time are now keeping fingers crossed owing to flight cancellations and soaring tariffs, the shutting down of a majority of hotels owing to LPG scarcity could also affect the campaigns.

KERALA
Assembly Poll

The CPM-led Left Democratic Front and the Congress-led United Democratic Front already unleashed political attacks against the BJP-NDA government at the Centre over the LPG crisis.

Kerala now has over 2.34 lakh overseas voters, a major chunk of whom are in the Gulf countries, largely hailing from the northern part of the state. The Indian Union Muslim League and Congress were generally considered the key beneficiaries of Malayali NRI voters.

Malayali NRIs, especially activists and supporters of political parties, used to come down in large numbers during elections and cast their votes. Politicians also used to carry out Gulf trips ahead of polls and attend events of the Malayali diaspora.

"There were even instances of Malayali NRIs from Gulf countries coming down in chartered flights during elections. But now many Malayali NRIs who used to regularly go to Kerala for casting votes are sharing concerns that they may not be able to travel owing to flight cancellations as well as the higher air fares," Indian Overseas Congress West Asia convener Mansoor Palloor told *DH*.

Meanwhile, campaign managers of political parties are also worried over the LPG crisis due to the West Asia tensions. As the campaign intensifies, political parties set up resting camps where food is provided to all workers participating in day-long campaigns. With a majority of eateries across the state already forced to pull shutters due to the LPG crisis, food supply during the campaign could also be affected.

Vijayan's remark against dissident triggers backlash

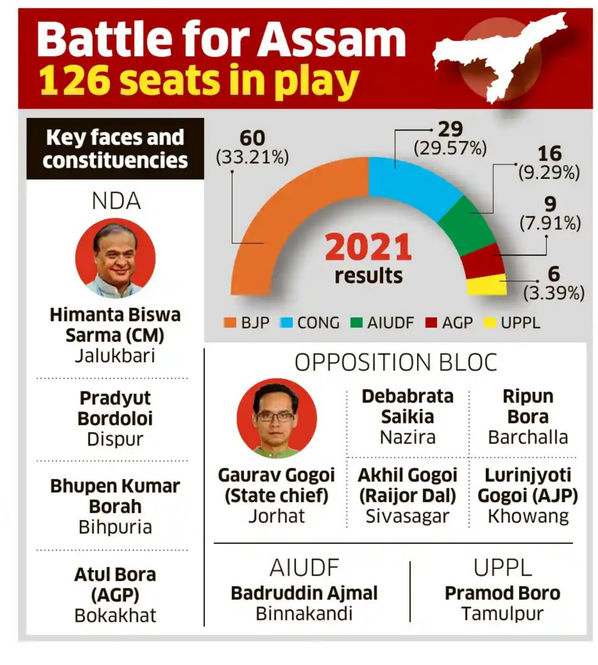
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, known for his harsh remarks against opponents, is at it again.

In a television interview, Vijayan described dissident senior CPM leader G Sudhakaran's decision to contest as a rebel candidate as "chettatharam" — a Malayalam term meaning "an act by a vile or uncouth fellow".

Sudhakaran hit back on Sunday, saying Vijayan did not understand the meaning of many Malayalam words and therefore made such remarks. Countering Vijayan's criticism that he was driven by excessive parliamentary ambition, Sudhakaran said that Vijayan himself was contesting for the ninth time.

Sudhakaran, a former minister, is now contesting from Ambalappuzha in Alappuzha against the CPM candidate.

The former minister recently quit the party, accusing the state and district leadership of insulting and sidelining him.



Centre spent Rs 683 cr on litigation in 12 years; over 7 lakh cases pending

Parliamentary panel flags rising expenses; Finance Ministry leads in pending cases

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Union government has spent Rs 683.72 crore on litigation between 2014-15 and December 2025, even as 7.14 lakh cases involving various ministries and departments are pending in various courts, with the Ministry of Finance topping the list with 1.94 lakh cases.

The data has been derived from the reports of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, which examined the Demands for Grants (2024-25 and 2025-26) of the Department of Legal Affairs in the Ministry of Law and Justice.

The highest amount spent on litigation was Rs 87.65 crore in 2024-25, while the ongoing fiscal 2025-26 showed an expense of Rs 74.05 crore till December 31, 2025.

The reports showed that litigation expenses have been rising year after year, though some years witnessed a decline.

In 2014-15, the government spent Rs 26.64 crore for litigation, which rose to Rs 37.43 crore, Rs 48.12 crore, and Rs 65.83 crore in the next three fiscals, only to dip to R 51.85 crore in 2018-19.

It further rose to Rs 61.08 crore in 2019-20 and saw a decline in 2020-21 and 2021-22, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, to Rs 58.43 crore and Rs 48.56 crore, respectively.

In 2022-23, it rose to Rs 57.45 crore, and to Rs 66.57 crore in 2023-24.

While the last 12 fiscals saw a cumulative expense of Rs 683.72 crore, the reports showed that the last 10 fiscals — 2016-17 to 2025-26 — saw the government spending Rs 619.65 crore on legal expenses.

Last April, the Ministry of Law and Justice issued the "Directive for the efficient and effective management of litigation by the government of India" to prevent "unwanted" litigation, minimise "unwarranted" appeals, and address "inconsistencies" in notifications and orders to reduce caseload.

Incidentally, the pending cases were down to 7.14 lakh as on December 31 last year compared to 7.18 lakh on 31 December, 2024.

Of the 7.14 lakh cases pending in the Supreme Court, high courts, district and sessions courts, and tribunals, the Ministry of Finance topped the list with 1.94 lakh cases (a marginal increase of around 1,000 from the previous cycle), followed by Indian Railways with 1.11 lakh cases (down from 1.15 lakh cases).

The Ministry of Defence came third with 94,104 pending cases, down from 96,526 cases.

Woman killed, 6 hurt as ropeway trolley crashes in Chhattisgarh

MAHASAMUND (CHHATTISGARH), PTI: A woman was killed and six other people were injured when a ropeway trolley crashed while descending from a hilltop temple in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district on Sunday, officials said.

The accident occurred shortly after 10 am when the trolley's cable snapped as it was bringing down seven passengers from the hilltop, Bagbahra sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) said.

Earlier, eight people were reported to be in the trolley.

The trolley plunged from a height of 200 to 300 feet, as per officials.

The ropeway service is commonly used by devotees to reach near the temple, located on the hilltop at an elevation of about 1,100 feet.

The SDM said the victims had arrived there to offer prayers at the Khallari Mata temple, located on a hill at Khallari (Bhimkhoj) village, during the ongoing nine-day Navratri festival.

A woman, identified as Ayushi Satkar (28) from Raipur, died on the spot, while six others, including her husband Rishabh Dhavre (29) and another minor relative, sustained injuries, she said.

Following the incident, another trolley carrying around 10 passengers, which had just begun ascending, was immediately brought back to the base.

Kabul hospital strike triggers grief, anger in Kashmir

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

The reported bombing of a hospital in Kabul during Ramzan earlier this week, which allegedly left over 400 people dead, has triggered a wave of grief and anger across Kashmir, with social media platforms turning into a space of mourning, outrage, and sharply worded political reactions.

Kashmiri users across Facebook and X condemned the targeting of a medical facility, with many blaming Pakistan and calling it a grave violation of humanitarian norms.

Calling the attack as "barbaric" and "beyond humanity," users stressed that hospitals and patients must remain protected even in conflict zones.

Among the prominent reactions, Iltija Mufti took to X to denounce the strike, calling it a "war crime" and stating that such acts were "a crime against humanity," especially during the holy month of Ramzan. Her post, accompanied by disturbing visuals from the site, was widely shared and amplified across the Valley.

A widely circulated Facebook post by political activist Salman Nizami termed the strike a "shameful act" and called the killing of patients the "lowest form of cowardice."

The post gained significant traction, with users echoing similar sentiments and expressing anguish over the scale of civilian casualties.

Anger on social media also took a political turn. A section of users openly criticised Pakistan's leadership, with several posts targeting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Asim Munir.

While there has been no official confirmation linking Islamabad to the attack, the intensity of such reactions underscored deep distrust and charged perceptions surrounding regional conflicts.

The attack during Ramzan added to the emotional intensity, with many calling it a violation of the sanctity of the holy month.

Assam Police camp attacked by ULFA(I) militants, 4 personnel injured

TINSUKIA (ASSAM), PTI: At least four security personnel were injured in a militant attack on an Assam Police Commando camp in Tinsukia district early on Sunday, a senior officer said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said counter operations have been launched to nab those behind the attack.

ULFA(I) claimed responsibility for the attack in Jagun area and said 'Operation Bujoni' was carried out in retaliation against Assam Police's repeated action against the banned outfit, and alleged drone attacks by the Army on its camps last year.

The attack, which occurred around 2.30 am, comes ahead of the Assembly elections, scheduled on April 9.

The militants fired multiple rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) shells at the camp, with five of the launched shells exploding. Security personnel stationed at the camp immediately retaliated, leading to a brief exchange of gunfire.

The officer said the attack is suspected to have been carried out by a seven-member group, which escaped across the inter-state border with Arunachal Pradesh under the cover of darkness.

The four security personnel injured in the attack were taken to Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) in Dibrugarh for treatment. AMCH superintendent Dhruvajyoti Bhuyan said all the injured were out of danger and in a stable condition.

Confirming the attack, Sarma said, "An incident has happened, and it is highly condemnable. Counter operations have been launched by Assam Police and the Army, and we are confident those responsible will be nabbed."

The CM refused to comment on the ULFA(I), claiming that the attack was carried out by it.

MISCELLANY

◆ COMICS ◆

Blondie

HONEY! HOLD UP!
OK, WE NEED TO TALK!
YOUR MISTLETOE APP IS GETTING ANNOYING!
I LOVE IT!!
REALLY! WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?!

Hagar The Horrible

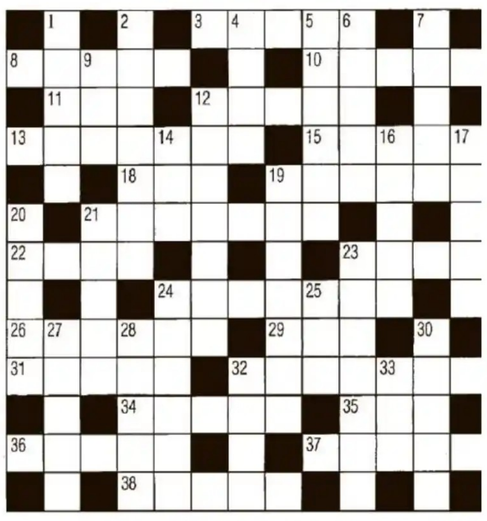
Beetle Bailey

Peanuts

HOW DO YOU GET A BLANKET FROM A FIVE-HUNDRED THOUSAND POUND CAT ?
MAYBE WE COULD USE SOME STRATEGY...
I KNOW SOME GOOD STRATEGY
WE'LL WAIT UNTIL HE DIES OF OLD AGE, AND WHILE EVERYONE IS AT THE FUNERAL, WE'LL RUSH OVER AND GRAB IT!

Marvin

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12378



CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 Like silly talk about a redhead, roughly speaking (5)
8 Make war on a tree! (5)
10 He's remarkably happy (5)
11 Some talk of smorgasbord (3)
12 The age of wrecked boats? (5)
13 The vagabond was let loose outright! (7)
15 I left the waiter something for a drink (5)
18 Outboard propeller! (3)
19 Tell tales about the tardy? (6)
21 A policeman, perhaps, if force is used (7)
22 Said to be a rough old collar (4)
23 It has its Geordie side (4)
24 Island of strange traumas (7)
26 Standing like statues lacking a key part? (6)
29 Rest somewhere on course (3)
31 It's hard when one is sold out (5)
32 Politician's version of ì23 Downî (7)
34 Nothing possibly said about a parting word (5)
35 A reduced payment (3)
36 Started a fire again with a quantity of petrol (5)
37 Amusing part of a sitcom, I see (5)
38 The Danes' mountains? (5)

DOWN
1 Mount of berries? (5)
2 To abandon stray cats is bad (4,3)
4 An earl can be shifty, it's true (4)
5 How a runner can blossom (6)
6 Like the attraction of a moving picture (5)
7 Hail tearfully? (5)
9 Used to be cut up! (3)
12 When Rosie's mad with us, it's no joke! (7)
14 Such men go far up in the air (3)
16 She gives thanks for any enclosure (5)
17 With money always, turn up and have fun (5)
19 Entertains with lager, perhaps, at some times (7)
20 Angry with something one may have to bear (5)
21 A vegan wouldn't take it away for a bit of a meal (5)
23 A bad shaking for ì32 Acrossî (7)
24 In abrupt style, points out a dodgy dud (6)
25 Can require some heating (3)
27 A bottle you can get into with a can opener! (5)
28 As a headdress, it's wrong for an artist (5)
30 Flier born to get out of line? (5)
32 The only one afoot? (4)
33 Baby bread basket (3)

ACROSS
3 Deluge (5)
8 Ending in death (5)
10 Royal domain (5)
11 Angry, informally (3)
12 Dead language (5)
13 Six-sided figure (7)
15 Donates (5)
18 Animal doctor (3)
19 Italian port and resort (6)
21 Say in passing (7)
22 Fibber (4)
23 Tablet (4)
24 Arms depot (7)
26 Elegant (6)
29 Metallic element (3)
31 Noblemen (5)
32 In general (2,5)
34 Snow leopard (5)
35 Vicious dog (3)
36 Snake poison (5)
37 To father (5)
38 Boy's name (5)

DOWN
1 Desert animal (5)
2 Corpse (7)
4 Act of lending (4)
5 Primary source (6)
6 Jeans fabric (5)
7 Foreign (5)
9 Levy (3)
12 Game of chance (7)
14 Information (3)
16 All-night watch (5)
17 Edge along (5)
19 Flower-shaped badge (7)
20 Forest clearing (5)
21 Manufacturer (5)
23 Cure for all ills (7)
24 Take for granted (6)
25 Nothing (3)
27 Speed contests (5)
28 Sailing vessel (5)
30 Concur (5)
32 Dull pain (4)
33 Floor covering (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2672

ACROSS: 1 Ascribe, 5 Glamour, 9 Grapple, 10 Belated, 11 Error, 12 Tarantula, 13 Sensitive, 15 Theft, 16 Banal, 18 Take pains, 21 In the past, 24 Exact, 25 Dubious, 26 Turmoil, 27 Pretext, 28 Matador.

DOWN: 1 Algiers, 2 Chagrin, 3 Impartial, 4 Exert, 5 Go berserk, 6 All-in, 7 Obtrude, 8 Radiant, 14 In transit, 15 Top-secret, 16 Build-up, 17 Notable, 19 In a word, 20 Settler, 22 Elope, 23 Totem.

◆SU-DO-KU-6860◆

6	3	5	1				4	
		9	3					
					6			3
					9			4
	2	1				7	6	
4			5					
3			7					
					2	6		
	6				3	8	5	1

medium

2	7	8	6	3	9	5	4	1
4	6	1	7	5	8	9	2	3
5	3	9	2	1	4	8	6	7
3	9	4	8	7	5	6	1	2
6	8	5	4	2	1	7	3	9
1	2	7	9	6	3	4	8	5
7	5	3	1	4	6	2	9	8
8	1	6	5	9	2	3	7	4
9	4	2	3	8	7	1	5	6

SOLUTION TO 6859

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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							Triple Word Score	RACK 1
C3	M3	U1	T1	P3	B3	V4		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 2
B3	C3	A1	I1	E1	T1	K5		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 3
N1	M3	C3	N1	T1	E1	O1		
							Triple Word Score	RACK 4
U1	E1	K5	N1	S1	L1	C3		

PAR SCORE 160-170
by JUDD

FOUR RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 20 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

M3	A1	N1	U1	R1	E1	S1	RACK 1	= 62
A1	N1	C3	I1	E1	N1	T1	RACK 2	= 61
P3	A1	R1	S1	N1	I1	P3	RACK 3	= 61
F4	L1	I1	R1	T1	E1	D2	RACK 4	= 83

PAR SCORE 175-185 JUDD'S TOTAL 267

JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

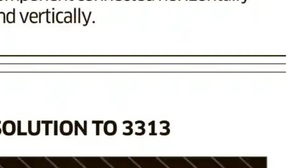
Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

PPYPE

CXOIT

GREJGO

TECIOX


Any chance you'll work on our house one of these days?
You know I love this kind of thing. And Max will love it!
BUILDING AN ELABORATE DOGHOUSE IN THE BACKYARD WAS HIS ---

Get the free JUST JUMBLE app • Follow us on Twitter @PlayJumble

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Answer here: (Answers tomorrow)

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Saturday's Jumbles: PROVE BLISS CABANA CATTLE
Answer: Even with thousands of satellites in orbit, there's still — SPACE AVAILABLE

HITORI-3314

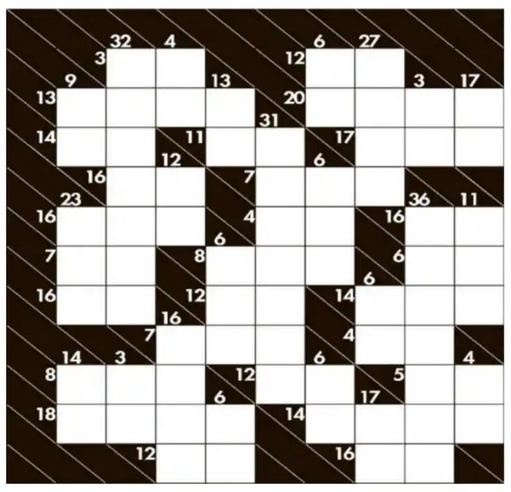
1	4	4	3	6	7	8	5
6	2	1	8	5	4	7	3
8	5	2	4	5	7	1	6
3	4	4	2	8	5	2	5
1	6	7	5	1	8	5	1
5	7	3	4	4	2	6	8
5	8	5	2	1	6	5	5
6	3	8	6	2	1	1	5

SOLUTION TO 3313

4	■	3	■	1	6	8	■
2	5	7	6	■	4	■	3
3	■	1	■	7	2	5	4
6	3	4	2	5	1	■	8
8	■	6	■	3	■	4	7
■	1	■	4	■	8	7	2
5	6	2	8	4	7	3	1
■	8	■	7	2	■	1	■

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

KAKURO- 3314



SOLUTION TO 3313

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

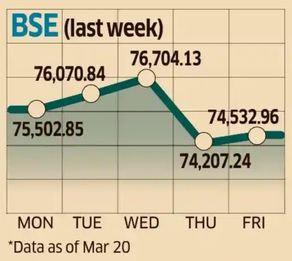
SU DO KU X - 3863

■	1			9		4		■
	■						■	2
9		■				8	3	
7		2	■		■		5	3
				■	6	2		
	4	1	7		■			
		■				■		
	5					3	■	
■	7		5		1		6	■

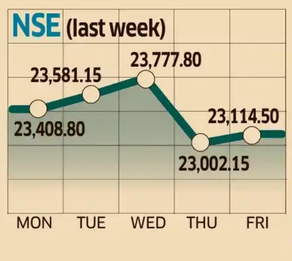
SOLUTION TO 3862

9	6	7	4	3	2	8	1	5
8	1	2	9	5	6	3	4	7
3	5	4	8	1	7	9	6	2
7	2	6	3	9	1	4	5	8
4	3	8	2	7	5	6	9	1
1	9	5	6	4	8	2	7	3
6	7	3	1	2	4	5	8	9
5	8	9	7	6	3	1	2	4
2	4	1	5	8	9	7	3	6

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.



*Data as of Mar 20



TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
ETERNAL	7.55%	HDFCBANK	-4.47%
TATA STEEL	7.25%	HINDUNILVR	-3.55%
TECH M	3.98%	BEL	-3.08%
M&M	3.87%	BAJFINANCE	-2.88%
ULTRACEMCO	3.02%	BAJAJFINSV	-1.66%

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
ETERNAL	7.70%	SHRIRAM FIN	-6.48%
TATASTEEL	7.23%	HDFC BANK	-4.47%
MAHI&MAHI	4.61%	CIPLA	-4.43%
JSW STEEL	4.49%	HINDALCO	-3.93%
TECH M	3.90%	HINDUSTAN UNI	-3.58%

Sensex (52-week)

Mar 20, 2025	Mar 20, 2026	
76,348.06	74,532.96	-2.38%

Nifty (52-week)

Mar 20, 2025	Mar 20, 2026	
23,190.65	23,114.50	-0.33%

10-year Bond yield 6.73%

Exchange Rates*

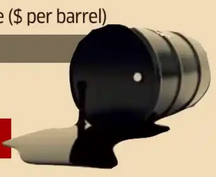
Dollar	₹ 93.53	SGD	₹ 73.21
Pound	₹ 125.15	Yen (100 units)	₹ 58.94
Euro	₹ 107.94		

*Markets were closed on 19 Mar on account of Ugadi

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)

BRENT CRUDE
$112.19*
3.26%
*Rate as of Mar 21



Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)
Petrol* ₹102.92 ₹0%
Diesel* ₹90.99 ₹0%
*Rates as of Mar 22 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹ 22100 - 22600
Arabica Cherry	₹ 12000 - 13400
Robusta Parchment	₹ 17700 - 18000
Robusta Cherry	₹ 9150 - 10000

*Rates as on Mar 17

Other Commodities

Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹ 694
Cross Breed (CB)	₹ 675

*Average rates as on Mar 20

Indian cos facing shipment delays, raw material shortages amid conflict: CII

NEW DELHI, PTI: Indian companies are facing disruptions ranging from shipment delays to shortages of key raw materials due to the ongoing West Asia conflict, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said on Sunday, highlighting growing stress across sectors dependent on global trade flows.

In a statement, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said firms are already seeing "downstream effects" as the conflict disrupts key maritime routes and tightens global supply chains.

"Indian companies are experiencing downstream effects, from shipment delays to constraints in key energy inputs, as well as emerging shortages in essential raw materials and intermediates across several sectors that rely heavily on timely cross-border flows," he said.

The industry body noted that disruptions have also placed pressure on energy markets and trade, affecting both imports and exports, with ripple-effects being felt across manufacturing and other industries.

"The conflict in the Middle East has disrupted critical maritime routes and placed pressure on global supply chains, energy markets, and both imports and exports," Banerjee stated.

Despite emerging challenges, CII underscored that India is better-placed than in the past to absorb external shocks.

Banerjee said the country entered this phase "from a position of strength", supported by structural reforms and the government's push for Atmanirbhar Bharat, which has strengthened domestic resilience.

The industry lobby said the government's response has been "quick, calibrated and continuous", with measures, including crude oil diversification, maximisation of LPG production, export facilitation and currency stabilisation.

According to CII, the Indian industry is adapting to the shocks by accelerating energy diversification, optimising supply chains and protecting jobs.

It also highlighted the importance of ongoing investments in renewable energy, green hydrogen, biofuels, and energy efficiency, calling them strategic imperatives to reduce vulnerability to geopolitical energy shocks.

While the situation remains challenging, we are confident that the government's approach, combined with its partnership-driven engagement with all stakeholders, will help India withstand this shock and preserve its forward-economic momentum, Banerjee stated.

The industry lobby observed that the challenge is significant but so is India's capacity to respond proactively, securing all its interests.

'Mukesh Ambani's $300 bn Texas hedge is a nod to MAGA'

With energy markets in turmoil, Ambani is dialing down his dependence on West Asia

ANDY MUKHERJEE
BLOOMBERG OPINION

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani. PTI FILE PHOTO

It took a war in Iran to reveal the full extent of billionaire Mukesh Ambani's sway over the White House — and his centrality to mending the frayed US-India bilateral relationship.

Ten days after Iran effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz, plunging global energy markets into chaos, a relatively obscure corporate entity in Texas broke the silence. America First Refining, the vehicle poised to fire up the first major, world-scale oil refinery on American soil since 1976, announced it had received a "nine-figure investment from a global supermajor at a 10-figure valuation." More importantly, it had secured a 20-year purchase agreement for the refinery's output from that same mystery partner.

The shroud of anonymity didn't last long. President Donald Trump took to Truth Social to unmask the benefactor, thanking Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. for anchoring a "historic $300 billion deal," the largest in US history.

Last year, when Washington and New Delhi were locked in a bitter spat over tariffs and nontariff barriers, I argued that India's richest tycoon could play the ultimate peacemaker. My thesis was based on Ambani's hunger for US ethane — an increasingly attractive feedstock for his sprawling petrochemicals empire. By importing more American molecules, he could help narrow the US trade deficit with India while giving Trump the Make America Great Again (MAGA) bragging rights he craves.

But even stronger evidence arrived last week. It appears that the 68-year-old businessman is getting directly involved in the infrastructure of the Permian Basin, America's oil-producing heartland. The purchase commitment acts as a virtual 12,000-mile conveyor belt between the Port of Brownsville and his Indian gas crackers. In all likelihood, Texas will produce the shale ethane and propane streams; Reliance will turn them into polyethylene and polypropylene, compounds that clothe, house, and package the modern world.

For America First Refining, making gasoline and diesel exclusively from US sweet crude is a way to earn the margin that's currently pocketed by refineries abroad. Co-Chief Executive Officer John Calce wants to start selling fuel from the refinery by 2029.

Although Reliance hasn't publicly commented on the deal, the conglomerate's plan appears rooted in geopolitics. With energy markets in turmoil, Ambani is dialing down his dependence on the Middle East.

For decades, the family's fortune was tied to the Persian Gulf. Mukesh's father, Dhirubhai began his career as a gas-station attendant in the Yemeni city of Aden — then a British crown colony — before returning home to start a trading operation in yarn. In the 1990s, Reliance set up the Jamnagar complex in Gujarat. It would eventually become the world's single-largest refining hub, built to process the heavy, sour crude that flowed across the Arabian Sea.

But after the Ukraine conflict got underway in 2022, Ambani and other Indian refiners pivoted to buying discounted Russian oil. That put them in the crosshairs of the Trump administration, which blamed Indian billionaires for financing Vladimir Putin's war machine. In August, the US imposed a punitive 25% duty on Indian imports, on top of a 25% reciprocal tariff. Although Washington has since put away the stick to pursue a trade deal with New Delhi, it reserves the right to wield it any time.

Yet, even here, Ambani found a way to win a reprieve from the war-induced shortages threatening daily life in India. According to *Bloomberg News*, "intensive engagement by the Reliance leadership" helped secure a 30-day waiver from Washington to buy Russian oil currently stranded at sea. Although that exemption has since become global, Ambani's commitment to purchase from the Brownsville project makes India's hall pass special. The tycoon has successfully transitioned from being a war profiteer in the eyes of the US Treasury to becoming a strategic partner.

The Texas plant is being touted as the "cleanest in the world." Instead of using dirty fuel oil or methane to heat the refining towers, it will burn hydrogen, whose only byproduct is water vapor. This is bound to have piqued Ambani's interest — if he can port the technology back home, he will be able to protect his petrochemicals revenue from future global carbon taxes in Europe.

The tech upgrade will also bring the family arc to its logical conclusion. Dhirubhai was the original "Polyester Prince." Mukesh perfected the art of refining the crude. He used the cash flows to dominate India's telecom, media, and retail landscapes. Now Anant, his youngest child and heir apparent for the energy business, will spend his career deciding where the all-important molecules must come from and how best to put them out in the world.

The message from the patriarch seems to be clear: No matter who's at war with whom, the conveyor belt to Gujarat must never stop. It's a masterclass in MAGA diplomacy that will also serve the broader US-India relationship. For Washington and New Delhi to move past the never-ending cycle of bickering over quotas and tariffs — while a mercurial president resides in the White House — they need the cold, hard reality of mutual dependency. Ambani has shown both sides exactly how to do it.

Paragon steps beyond core market with Eeken, expansion strategy

Producing 5 lakh pairs of overall footwear daily, homegrown brand targets double-digit growth

HRITHIK KIRAN BAGADE
BENGALURU, DHNS

Paragon Footwear, long synonymous with affordable, durable offerings, is sharpening its focus on premiumisation, as it looks to capture younger consumers, without straying from its value-driven roots. With over five decades in the market, the Bengaluru-headquartered company is betting on its sub-brand Eeken to tap into demand from urban consumers aged 20-30 seeking stylish yet accessible options.

This push is part of a broader strategy that includes expanding exports, strengthening its white-labelling business, and scaling up Exclusive Brand Outlets (EBOs), all aimed at driving 12-15% revenue growth in the coming years.

The company reported revenues of Rs 1,652.1 crore in FY25, and returned to profitability with a net profit of Rs 35.4 crore, according to Tracxn.

"Our main brand, Paragon, caters to open footwear, while Eeken has been growing at 35-40%. Its revenue contribution is about 5% today, but there is significant headroom," said Sidharth Zacharia Vijoo, Executive Vice-President – Production, Paragon Footwear.

Launched in 2019, Eeken gained traction after the pandemic, as consumer preferences shifted towards comfort, design, and versatility. The brand offers sports shoes, clogs, flip-flops, sandals, and women's and kids' footwear, typically priced between Rs 800 and Rs 1,500.

"Premiumisation is visible across segments. While the mass market focuses on utility, comfort and design are now equally important. Eeken targets a younger, more urban audience that values trendiness, but remains price-conscious," Vijoo told *DH*.

Currently focused on Tier-1 cities, Eeken is also seeing growing interest from Tier-2 markets. The brand is expected to reach an output of about 4,000 pairs per day, with around 20 new designs introduced each month. With a distribution network of nearly 500 partners, Paragon expects Eeken to achieve over Rs 120 crore in turnover this fiscal.

Founded in 1975 in Kerala, Paragon began as a manufacturer of rubber chappals and expanded nationwide by 1982. Its blue-and-white Hawai chappals became a staple across India, alongside a strong presence in school shoes.

Today, the company produces around 5 lakh pairs daily, translating to over 14 crore pairs annually, across 26 facilities in Kottayam, Salem, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad, using materials such as PU (Polyurethane), PVC (Polyvinyl Chloride), and EVA (Ethylene Vinyl Acetate).

Focus on exports

Leveraging this scale and expertise, Paragon is accelerating its push into exports and white-labelling. The company has already partnered with global brands such as Germany's Deichmann and is in discussions with additional European players.

"Exports have been a focus only in recent years, but the opportunity is significant. The pandemic disrupted supply chains in China, prompting global brands to diversify sourcing. India has emerged as a viable alternative," Vijoo noted, adding that many companies are looking to reduce their dependence on China.

White-labelling, where manufacturers produce goods that are rebranded by retailers, is central to this strategy, allowing Paragon to expand globally without building standalone brand recognition in every market.

As of early 2026, Paragon exports to 19 countries, including the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the US. However, exports still account for less than 1% of total revenue, leaving ample room for growth. The company is also optimistic about potential gains from free trade agreements, particularly with the EU, though geopolitical uncertainties remain a concern.

Domestically, Paragon continues to rely on its strong presence in the mass market, where affordability remains critical, especially in Tier-2 and 3 cities. Its core portfolio still caters to consumers seeking durable footwear in the Rs 150-400 range.

To strengthen its retail footprint, Paragon is expanding its network of EBOs, currently numbering around 70 in India. The company plans to add at least 50 more exclusive outlets this year, primarily in southern and western regions, with a growing focus on a Franchisee-Owned, Franchisee-Operated (FOFO) model. It is also refurbishing existing stores and onboarding new franchisees, while quick commerce is emerging as a key growth channel.

DH INTERVIEW

'AI lowers the barrier to becoming a developer'

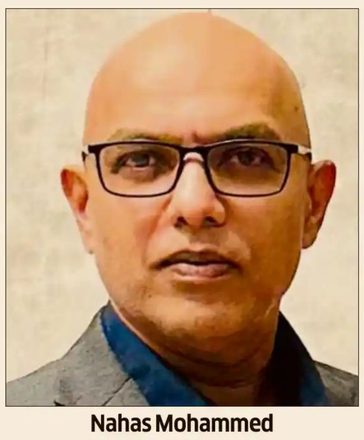
GitHub is an AI-powered developer platform, and India is home to the second-largest developer community on the Microsoft-owned platform. In October last year, GitHub in its Octoverse report pointed out that India added over 5.2 million developers in 2025, which accounts for a little over 14% of GitHub's total 36 million new developers in 2025. Currently, there are about 24 million developers in the country. In a candid interview, **Nahas Mohammed**, Director, Enterprise, GitHub, tells **Uma Kannan** of *DH that* India has overtaken the US to become the world's largest source of open-source contributors, writing, maintaining, and improving the software the entire global technology economy runs on. *Edited excerpts:*

India is now one of the fastest-growing developer communities on GitHub. What is driving this momentum?

India's developer growth has multiple engines behind it. A domestic tech sector growing fast enough to generate its own gravitational pull on developer talent. A startup ecosystem building products for the world — India now has over 100 unicorns, and behind each one of them is an engineering team solving hard problems and driving the next wave of innovation. India is the world's innovation engine — global enterprises have moved well-past 'India for delivery' and are now choosing India for innovation. And underneath all of it, an education system that made a long-term bet on technology — coding in schools, technically-ambitious universities, and a graduate pipeline operating at scale. All these elements have converged to create the world's fastest-growing developer community.

How is India positioning itself in the global AI market?

The real question is how India channels 24 million developers into sustained global influence in the AI market, and that requires deliberate choices. First, accelerating innovation by moving developers up the value-chain, and creating environments where developers can move fast, build ambitiously, and work with the best tools available to build the future of AI. Second, using AI to keep the community growing. One of the most-important things AI does is to lower the barrier to becoming a developer. It makes the craft more accessible, helps new developers get productive faster, and opens the doors for more to start experimenting and getting into the field. We see this in our own data: 80% of new developers joining GitHub adopt Copilot within their first week, showing that AI-assisted development has become a baseline expectation, not a differentiator. For India, where the developer community is already growing at over 36% annually, this matters enormously. More developers getting productive faster means more experimentation, more innovation, and more people building AI-powered solutions to India's own challenges. A growing developer community using AI to build AI isn't just good for India's technology sector — it's how India builds a self-reinforcing innovation ecosystem that keeps accelerating.



Nahas Mohammed

How are tech companies adopting AI-assisted coding tools, and what impact does it have on software development?

Across India, companies are embedding AI throughout the entire software development lifecycle — and adoption spans well-beyond the technology sector. Global GSIs (Global System Integrators) are rolling out GitHub's AI-powered platform at scale. Infosys and Wipro have both launched GitHub Centres of Excellence — physical experience centres dedicated to AI-powered software development. When engineering organisations of this scale embed AI deeply into how they work, they're reshaping how software gets delivered to businesses and governments across every major economy. The practices being developed inside these organisations are becoming the global reference point for AI-powered software development. Software is the world's most-valuable export. India has long delivered it. Now it's defining how it gets built.

When you give developers tools like GitHub Copilot, you free them from the repetitive and the routine, and they spend more time on the problems that actually require human judgment and creativity. The companies that understand that distinction are the ones pulling ahead.

India recently became a leading contributor to open source. What does this mean for its global tech influence?

For the first time, India has overtaken the US to become the world's largest source of open-source contributors and ranks second in contributions to public generative AI projects. Open source is where some of the world's most-useful technology gets built, so leading here means Indian developers are setting direction, establishing standards, and shaping infrastructure. AI tools also have a key role to play in the open source story. It lowers the barrier to contribution, helps new developers understand complex projects faster, and shortens the path from idea to implementation. And that opportunity grows when AI tools are accessible to every developer, not just those inside established ecosystems. But open source leadership isn't self-sustaining, and this is where the industry needs to come together. Companies have a real responsibility here — contributing back to the open-source projects they depend on and creating space for their developers to participate.

What role will GitHub and AI tools like Copilot play in shaping the next generation of Indian developers?

The first generation of truly AI-native developers is graduating into the workforce right now. AI is embedded into how they work, and with India's scale, even a fraction of that cohort producing breakthrough innovations changes the global technology landscape. India has created a developer pipeline no other country matches. But policy can only go so far. The industry has a responsibility to meet that next generation where they are, equip them with the tools they'll actually use in the workforce, and help close the gap between education and a real technical career. That's why GitHub Education exists. It's free, globally-accessible, and gives every verified student access to Copilot. This means that by the time they graduate, developers have the skills needed to run with AI-powered software development.

Keeping that pipeline strong requires the entire ecosystem — policy, industry, and platforms — to invest in making sure every aspiring developer in India, regardless of where they study or who they know, has a genuine shot at the global stage. That's how India's developer community keeps growing and keeps leading.

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Ipca Laboratories (ID: IPCALAB) — BUY
Upside +18%** | Last close ₹1,545 | Target: ₹1,820*

Hindalco (ID: HINDALCO) — BUY
Upside +27%** | Last close ₹874 | Target: ₹1,110*

Reliance Industries (ID: RELIANCE) — BUY
Upside +24%** | Last close ₹1,414 | Target: ₹1,750*

Poonawalla Fincorp (ID: POONAWALLA) — BUY
Upside +42%** | Last close ₹394 | Target: ₹560*

Delhivery (ID: DELHIVERY) — BUY
Upside +37%** | Last close ₹423 | Target: ₹580*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

When war does not move gold

ANUBHAV SRIVASTAVA
MANAGING PARTNER, ARYZEN CAPITAL ADVISORS

West Asia is on fire. Oil tankers are rerouting around the Strait of Hormuz, yet the yellow metal is off its recent highs and losing ground, fast. If you learnt investing from a textbook, this makes no sense.

So, what is going on?

The old playbook is broken, again.

This is the second time, the pandemic crash being the first, in recent memory where gold has correlated with equity markets and followed a secular fall. Among other factors, the yellow metal does not respond to gunfire alone. It responds to what gunfire does to money. Historically, war meant inflation, currency debasement, and a flight from paper assets, all of which it thrives on. The chain still holds, but there is now a missing link. Between the conflict and the inflation stands the US Federal Reserve, keeping rates high and showing no sign of flinching, even as global central banks keep buying and some West Asian nations consider selling assets to shore up their pegged currencies.

Higher rates mean a higher opportunity cost for holding gold, which pays nothing. They also mean a stronger dollar, and gold priced in dollars becomes more expensive for every non-US buyer. Indian buyers, Turkish buyers, Chinese buyers: all of them need more of their own currency for the same ounce. Demand softens. Price corrects.

Interestingly, the war may be compounding this. An oil supply shock on Hormuz fears keeps headline inflation elevated in the US, which gives the Fed cover, even obligation, to stay restrictive. The conflict that should theoretically send gold soaring is, through a chain of causation most retail investors never follow, sustaining the very policy conditions that suppress it.

And what of silver?

Silver has behaved like a small cap in recent weeks, wildly swinging before now falling harder than gold, and the widening gold-silver ratio deserves attention. Silver is a hybrid commodity: part precious metal and store of value, part industrial input for solar panels, electronics, and batteries. When it underperforms gold this sharply, it typically signals either a supply glut or a growth scare building beneath the surface. Today, possibly both. It may be worthwhile treating silver as an early warning indicator here, not merely a cheaper alternative to gold.

In India, there is an additional complication.

A weakening rupee partially cushions the domestic price even as COMEX gold falls, which is why domestic prices have somewhat held up better than the global spot price might suggest. Precious metals are global dollar denominated assets. It is cold comfort, but it is real and it matters for how you read the charts. The bigger factor to watch is jewellery and bullion demand. With prices at these levels, discretionary buying at weddings and festivals is being deferred. Retailers are reporting slower footfall. That demand destruction, if it persists, removes one of the traditional floors under Indian gold prices.

Structural buyers vs tactical sellers: the long and short of it

None of this means the long-term case for gold is broken. Central banks globally, including the RBI, have been accumulating gold at a pace not seen in decades. This is sovereign risk management in an era of sanctions and de-dollarisation, not speculation. What prices are reflecting right now is traders selling, not institutions rethinking long-term allocations, and that distinction matters.

For investors, gold ETFs remain the most practical route: liquid, low cost, and free of the purity and storage concerns that come with physical metal. The current correction, uncomfortable as it feels, is the kind which may see investors using these as entry points with a medium to long term view.

The real battlefield

The real contest right now is not in West Asia. It is in Washington, at the Federal Reserve. Until the Fed signals a genuine pivot on rates, gold may struggle to sustain a rally, regardless of what happens at the Strait of Hormuz and regardless of how many central banks keep building reserves.

Rates before rockets. That is the market's verdict, for now.

Equity markets have been sideways for 18 months: Is it good time to invest?

Current volatility due to global factors, but India's growth fundamentals intact

RUSHABH DESAI

The Indian equity markets started their sideways journey from September 2024, mainly due to expensive valuations, and saw a price correction in early 2025 and continued moving sideways during the entire period of the year, due to weak earnings growth, US tariff uncertainty and FII selling. The markets again turned volatile in 2026, due to updates on AI disruption and geopolitical tensions in West Asia. Thus, the multiple uncertain factors and fearful events over the past 18 months, have left the Indian equity markets jittery.

Over the last two quarters, the Indian economy has displayed strong GDP growth and many of the listed companies, especially within the Nifty 500 index, at aggregate have shown robust double-digit earnings growth. The current market volatility is mainly due to global factors, but the fundamentals of growth in India remain intact. Unfortunately, it is very hard to predict market cycles, but the markets are expected to remain volatile and sideways till global uncertainties caused by geopolitical conflicts and AI disruption remain elevated.

During this phase, investors should not forget that the pain in the Indian equity markets caused by the prevailing geopolitical tensions and time correction will be temporary and the bounce will be inevitable.

We analysed the Indian equity markets during and past five violent events—Iraq war, Kargil war, World Trade Centre attack, Mumbai attack, and the Russia-Ukraine war—and found that during these times, the Sensex fell in the range of around -3% to -18%, but gained around 25% to 65% post these events over the next six months. Similarly, we also analysed 13 time correction periods from 2001, where the Nifty 50 gave no returns over 17-18 months and saw that post this period, the index generated around 30% returns in 12 months and around 76% returns in 36 months, on an average.

Looking at this data, one would argue that it is historical, but it is convincing enough to prove that volatility is temporary and equity markets eventually bounce back.

Over the past 17-18 months, from September 30, 2024, to March 13, 2026, large, mid-, and small-cap indices corrected in the range of -9% to -20%, price to earnings ratios (valuations) corrected sharply in the range of -20% to -34%, and earnings (EPS) saw a strong double-digit growth in the range of 10% to 38%. Valuations of large and small-cap indices are trading below their long-term historical averages and mid-cap valuations close to it. Prices and valuations of Indian equities within all three market caps have become very reasonable from their peaks, and with strong earnings growth seen, it clearly indicates ample margin of safety and tremendous upside opportunity from an investment point of view.

Keeping all the historical and current data in mind and the underperformance of Indian equity markets, compared with other global peers, tells us that these are good times and levels to invest in Indian equities, and it is just a matter of time for a strong bounceback once uncertainties subside.

Based on one's goals, risk appetite, time horizon, and asset allocation, investors can look at investing in all three market caps (large, mid, and small). Rather than betting on individual stocks or sectors, it is wise to invest via the diversified mutual fund route. Investors can comfortably invest lumpsum or in a staggered manner, if they still feel jittery about the uncertainties. Those investors, who have exhausted their cash by deploying in 2025, need not worry as they too have invested within the time correction pocket and have not missed out on the upside opportunity.

Lastly, it is only by investing in such times that one can achieve superior returns in the equity markets, but at the same time, to achieve such returns, one will need patience with a medium to long-term horizon.

(The writer is Founder—Rupee With Rushabh Investment Services)

Market Resilience

Sensex recoveries after global events

Geopolitical Event	Date	Correction (%)	Duration (weeks)	1M (%)	3M (%)	6M (%)
Iraq War	02-08-90	-14	36	26	39	65
Kargil War	03-05-99	-11	6	17	33	40
World Trade Center Attack	11-09-01	-18	2	18	35	45
26-11 Mumbai Attack	26-11-08	-3	1	20	24	36
Pulwama Attack	14-02-19	-2	1	9	12	14
Russia-Ukraine Conflict	24-02-22	-11	23	7	19	25

MOVEMENT OF MAJOR INDICES ON NSE

Date	30-09-2024	13-03-2026	17.5 Months	30-09-2024	13-03-2026	17.5 Months	30-09-2024	13-03-2026	17.5 Months
Index Name	Price	Price	Price Change	P/E	P/E	P/E Change	EPS	EPS	EPS Change
Nifty Midcap 150	22312	20233	-9.30%	45.7	30.1	-34.00%	489	671	37.40%
Nifty Smallcap 250	18411	14858	-19.30%	33.5	24.5	-27.00%	550	607	10.50%
Nifty 500	24245	21391	-11.80%	27.9	21.7	-22.10%	870	986	13.30%
Nifty 100	26890	23849	-11.30%	24.9	19.9	-20.20%	1081	1201	11.20%

WEEK AHEAD

Equity markets likely to remain volatile

Global uncertainties and sustained pressure from high energy prices to drive markets

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

Indian equities are likely to trade cautiously with elevated volatility this week amid global uncertainties and sustained pressure from high energy prices. Geopolitical tensions in West Asia continue to weigh on emerging markets, including India, keeping overall risk sentiment fragile. Foreign investor activity remains a key drag, with FIIs recording massive outflows of Rs 81,263 crore in the past 13 sessions. Currency pressures have also intensified, with the Indian rupee breaching the 93 mark to hit a record low of Rs 93.49 against the US dollar, driven by strong dollar demand and broader global currency trends.

Key global cues to watch include flash manufacturing and services PMI readings from the US and UK, US crude inventory data and labour market indicators, which will offer insights into economic momentum and the future policy path. On the domestic front, India's manufacturing, services and composite PMI data will be closely tracked for signs of economic activity.

Last week saw sharp volatility, with the Nifty witnessing wide swings before closing marginally lower by 0.16% at 23,115. Broader markets were mixed, as the Nifty Midcap100 rose 0.2%, while the Nifty Smallcap250 declined 0.4%, reflecting selective participation across segments. Sectorally, performance remained varied, with Nifty Auto (+2%) emerging as the top gainer, supported by resilient demand trends and improving rural sentiment, followed by Nifty Metal (+1.1%) on the back of firm global commodity prices. Nifty PSU Bank (+0.8%) and IT (+0.4%) also posted modest gains, aided by selective buying and currency support for export-oriented names. On the downside, Oil & Gas (-2.2%) and Defence (-2.4%) were among the key laggards amid profit booking and weakness in crude-linked sentiment, while FMCG (-1.9%), Realty (-1.9%) and Pharma (-1.3%) also declined.

Elevated crude oil prices are a key concern, with Brent briefly touching a high of $119 per barrel following attacks on energy infrastructure, amid tight supply conditions and geopolitical disruptions. For an import-dependent economy like India, this poses multiple challenges—fueling inflation, widening the current account deficit and exerting pressure on the currency.

The US Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged at 3.5%–3.75%, signalling a data-dependent stance in the face of steady growth and sticky inflation, thereby keeping global risk sentiment mixed. Indications of a slower pace of rate cuts have reinforced concerns around tighter financial conditions.

Going ahead, sectoral trends are expected to remain divergent. IT and energy stocks could see relative support, aided by a weaker rupee and elevated crude prices, while banks, auto and consumption sectors may face pressure amid margin concerns, demand moderation and global headwinds. Defence and power-related segments could also attract interest, supported by geopolitical developments and the early onset of summer, which is likely to drive higher electricity demand.

The pharmaceutical sector continues to show steady momentum, with the domestic market growing 12% YoY in February 2026, led by chronic therapies such as cardiac and anti-diabetic segments. Growth is supported by rising disease prevalence, therapy expansion and consistent demand for key formulations. Meanwhile, the general insurance sector reported 10% YoY growth, driven by strong traction in health insurance and improving penetration.

In the consumer segment, early summer conditions have boosted demand for room air conditioners, supported by rising temperatures and pent-up demand, while refrigerator demand is expected to pick up in the coming weeks. Seasonal trends and pricing adjustments linked to efficiency norms are likely to support revenue growth, although competitive intensity remains elevated.

Overall, markets are likely to remain volatile in the near term, with global cues, crude oil movements and foreign fund flows driving sentiment.

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

AI generates most value in customer service, says report

UMA KANNAN
BENGALURU, DHNS

About 59% of deployed AI initiatives are generating increased business value for banks. Infosys recently released its Bank Tech Index, analysing data from 400 of the largest banks by assets in Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and North America.

According to the findings, AI delivers the largest cost efficiencies in software engineering and cybersecurity for banks, followed by customer service and business operations.

Also, it found that AI initiatives that are cancelled before deployment increased 33%, indicating that banks have increased scrutiny of the ROI of AI initiatives.

"Customer experience and trust have become central priorities for banks. AI is being applied across contact centres and digital channels to enable hyper-personalised engagement that helps customers achieve resolutions faster," Dennis Gada, EVP, Global Head, Banking and Financial Services, Infosys, said.

Gada said banks are not only leaning in with conviction, but with discipline. "While AI initiatives continue to increase, leaders are far-more selective, prioritising areas where impact is both measurable and sustainable. Increasingly, the focus is on embedding AI as a core operating capability, one that simultaneously improves customer experience, strengthens engineering productivity, modernises platforms, and enables scale across the enterprise," he added in the report.

The report also found that spend on core technologies is expected to increase by 3.6% between January 2026 and June 2026, from December 2025. It said banks need stronger trading infrastructure to price products accurately, manage real-time risks, and handle larger transaction volumes.

According to the findings, cybersecurity spend is also expected to rise. Escalation in ransomware, AI-enabled fraud and tighter compliance requirements are forcing banks to strengthen core defences.

Artificial Intelligence investement is increasing, as banks move from pilots to scaled deployments.

DH REVIEW

Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra: Refined with meaningful upgrades

ROHIT K V N
BENGALURU, DHNS

Earlier this month, Samsung's Android flagship Galaxy S26 Ultra hit stores in India.

The device comes in three configurations—12GB RAM + 256GB storage, 12GB RAM + 512GB storage, and 16GB RAM + 1TB storage—for Rs 1,39,999, Rs 1,59,999, and Rs 1,89,999, respectively.

Design, build quality and display

The new S26 Ultra retains most of the design elements of the previous iterations, but is more refined. It is slimmer, weighs less, and yet manages to pack a 5,000mAh capacity battery.

The aluminium frame, which comes with a matte finish around the edge, offers a really good grip to hold it firmly. The device features Corning's Gorilla Glass Armour 2 on the front and Gorilla Glass Victus 2 on the back.

Also, the device comes with an IP68 rating, meaning it can survive a drop in a swimming pool up to a depth of 1.5 metres for close to 30 minutes.

It flaunts a massive 6.9-inch Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X display, which is the best screen on a mobile to consume multimedia content and to play graphics-rich games. The pictures and videos appear vibrant with darker black, making for a delightful viewing experience.

The S26 Ultra's exclusive Privacy Display feature is a very effective tool for protection against prying eyes in a crowded place.

When using the phone, the content on the screen will be visible only to the owner. Any form of content, be it a text notification, a video or photo, can only be viewed from the direct line of sight of the user.

And, the ultrasonic fingerprint sensor is absolutely top-class. It works smoothly without any issues.

SPEC SHEET

Display & Build: 6.9-inch Dynamic LTPO AMOLED 2X, Gorilla Glass Armour 2 (front) + Victus 2 (back), IP68 rating

Camera: 200MP main + 50MP ultrawide + 50MP periscope + 10MP telephoto; 12MP front with AI ISP

Performance & Software: Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 for Galaxy, Android 16 with OneUI 8.5, deep Galaxy AI integration

Battery & Extras: 5,000mAh, 60W fast charging, 25W wireless, built-in S Pen

Price: Starts at Rs 1,39,999

Performance

The S26 Ultra features a special 'Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 for Galaxy' chipset, custom-optimised to smoothly run advanced Galaxy AI features, support AAA gaming titles, 8K video recording and other heavy-duty tasks.

It runs Android 16-based OneUI 8.5. It is clean and easy to navigate through the settings. Also, it comes with several customisation options to visually enhance the user interface.

In the Galaxy S26 series, the Perplexity AI has been deeply embedded across select Samsung apps—including Samsung Notes, Clock, Gallery, Reminder and Calendar, as well as select third-party apps.

Besides Perplexity AI, users can also opt for Samsung Bixby or Google Gemini as their digital assistant.

Another unique aspect of the Galaxy S26 Ultra is the built-in S Pen. It is located on the left side at the base. You can take notes or draw. Even if it is bad, the Creative AI Studio app can turn any sketch into a piece of art.

With a 5,000mAh battery, it can easily last a whole day under normal usage. With a 60W charger, it can reach from zero to the 75% mark in around 30 minutes. It also supports 25W wireless charging and 4.5W reverse charging capability.

Photography

On the back, the phone boasts of a main 200MP wide sensor, a 50MP ultrawide camera, a 50MP periscope telephoto lens and a 10MP telephoto lens with a Laser AutoFocus sensor and LED flash.

The Galaxy S26 Ultra comes with wider apertures for improved low-light photography and enhanced Nightography Video for vibrant, clear footage in dim conditions. Also, it features the most advanced AI-powered editing tools to remove, add objects and do more, to deliver an enhanced photography experience.

On the front, it features a wide 12MP camera. The AI Image Signal Processor improvements seen in the main camera are now available on the selfie camera, delivering clear, crisp photos with natural skin tones and finer details in mixed lighting.

Final thoughts

The Samsung Galaxy S26 Ultra is an incremental upgrade over the predecessor. But, value-added features such as Privacy Display, custom Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 chipset, Galaxy AI-based photography tools (in particular object eraser), and built-in S Pen, make it stand apart from its rivals.

Conflict widens: Warns offensive against Hezbollah still in its early stages

Israel to 'advance targeted ground ops' in Lebanon

JERUSALEM, AFP

Israel's military will expand its ground operations in Lebanon against Hezbollah, its army chief said on Sunday, warning that the offensive against the group was still in its early stages.

"The operation against the Hezbollah terrorist organisation has only begun... This is a prolonged operation," Lieutenant General Eyal Zamir said in a statement.

"We are now preparing to advance the targeted ground operations and strikes according to an organised plan," he added.

Zamir's comments came as Israel struck more targets in south Lebanon on Sunday, including a key bridge, triggering a warning from the Lebanese president that it could be launching a full ground invasion.

Lebanon was pulled into the Middle East war when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2 to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in an Israeli-US strike.

Israel has sent troops into Lebanon and carried out extensive airstrikes, while Hezbollah has launched rocket barrages.

"In recent weeks, we have achieved significant accomplishments: we have struck more than 2,000 targets, dozens of weapons storage facilities, and struck and eliminated hundreds of terrorists," Zamir said.

"We will not stop until the threat is pushed away from the border and long term security is ensured for the residents of northern Israel," Zamir said.

A displaced girl sits outside her tent at a parking lot in Beirut's waterfront area, on Sunday. The Israeli military said it launched a wave of strikes on Beirut targeting the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah, after urging residents of several areas to evacuate. AFP

WEST ASIA CRISIS

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to pursue senior commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards "personally".
- Iran's critical water and energy infrastructure have suffered extensive damage due to US and Israeli strikes
- At least six overnight attacks targeted a US diplomatic and logistics centre at Baghdad's International Airport.

US may 'escalate to de-escalate' against Iran, says Bessent

The United States may need to "escalate" its attacks against Iran to be able to wind down the war, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Sunday, after President Donald Trump gave seemingly contradictory trajectories for the US military campaign, reports AFP.

47 injured as Iranian missile hits Israel's 'Little India'

JERUSALEM, PTI: At least 47 people were injured on Saturday evening after an Iranian missile struck the southern Israeli town of Dimona -- famous for the dome-shaped structure atop its nuclear centre and popularly known as "little India", rescue services said.

Among the injured was a 12-year-old boy in serious condition after being hit by shrapnel, officials from the Magen David Adom (MDA) rescue services and local residents told PTI.

A woman in her 30s was moderately hurt by glass shards, and 31 others suffered minor injuries from shrapnel or were hurt after falling over while running to shelters, they said. Some 14 others were treated for acute anxiety at Soroka Hospital in Beersheba.

"The missile fell on a community building, and nearby older houses collapsed under the impact. Most of the people were in shelters, so they were not hurt badly, except for the young boy who stayed outside," a local resident told PTI.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said it is investigating the failure to intercept the Iranian ballistic missile. The Israeli army said the air defences engaged the ballistic missile, but the interceptors failed to knock it down.

"The incident will be investigated," it said.

UN nuclear watchdog IAEA issued a call for "maximum military restraint" after the attack.

"The IAEA is aware of reports of an incident in the city of Dimona, Israel, involving a missile impact and has not received any indication of damage to the nuclear research center Negev," the IAEA said in a post on X.

Iran said it is targeting Dimona as a "response" to an earlier strike on the Natanz nuclear enrichment site. The IDF, however, said it was not responsible for striking Natanz earlier in the day.

Britain sees no evidence that Iran is targeting Europe with missiles

LONDON, REUTERS

British cabinet minister Steve Reed said on Sunday that there was no assessment that backed claims Iran is planning to strike Europe with ballistic missiles, or that it even has the capacity to do so.

On Saturday, the Israel Defence Forces posted on social media that Iran has missiles "that can reach London, Paris or Berlin".

"There is no assessment to substantiate what's being said," British Housing Secretary Reed told the BBC.

"I'm not aware of any assessment at all that they are even trying to target Europe, let alone that they could if they tried."

In a separate interview with Sky News, Reed said that U.S. President Trump spoke for himself when he threatened to "obliterate" Iran's power plants if Tehran did not fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours.

Asked to define Britain's position on Trump's deadline, Reed said: "The U.S. president is perfectly capable of speaking for himself and defending what it is that he's saying."

"We're not going to be dragged into the war, but we will protect our own interests in the region. We will work with our allies to de-escalate the situation."

US lawmaker seeks genocide label for 1971 Pak atrocities

WASHINGTON, PTI

US Congressman Greg Landsman has introduced a resolution in the US House of Representatives seeking to recognise the atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army and its allies, Jamaat-e-Islami, against Bengali Hindus on March 25, 1971, as "war crimes and genocide".

Landsman, a Democrat Congressman from Ohio, moved the resolution in the US House of Representatives on Friday, and it has been referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

The resolution states that on the night of March 25, 1971, the Government of Pakistan imprisoned Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and its military units, in conjunction with radical Islamist groups inspired by the ideology of Jamaat-e-Islami, began a general crackdown throughout East Pakistan code-named "Operation Searchlight" that involved widespread massacres of civilians.

It said that on March 28, 1971, United States Consul General in Dacca, Archer Blood, sent a telegram to Washington titled "Selective Genocide", in which he wrote, "Moreover, with support of Pak military, non-Bengali Muslims are systematically attacking poor people's quarters and murdering Bengalis and Hindus".

Landsman noted that on April 6, 1971, in what became known as the "Blood Telegram", Consul General Blood sent an objection to the official United States Government silence on the conflict, signed by 20 members of the Consulate General Dacca. "But we have chosen not to intervene, even morally, on the grounds that the Awami conflict, in which unfortunately the overworked term genocide is applicable, is purely an internal matter of a sovereign state," the then diplomat said in the telegram.

The resolution moved by Landsman urges the House of Representatives to condemn the atrocities committed by the Armed Forces of Pakistan against the people of Bangladesh on March 25, 1971.

US Prez orders immigration agents to airports amid budget standoff

Bid to alleviate soaring congestion at security screenings

WASHINGTON, AFP

Immigration agents will be deployed in US airports beginning Monday, aiming to alleviate soaring congestion at security screenings amid a weeks-long budget standoff over President Donald Trump's mass deportation drive, officials said.

Trump announced the extraordinary move in a social media post Sunday morning, sending officials racing to quickly develop a plan.

Tom Homan, the president's senior border aide, confirmed to CNN that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents would be shifted from their normal duties to airports on Monday, but they would not be doing jobs they were untrained for. "I don't see an ICE agent looking at an x-ray machine, because you're not trained in that," he said on CNN's "State of the Union."

Rather, the agents would help "wherever we can provide extra security," such as monitoring exits. "We'll put together a plan today and we'll execute tomorrow," he said.

Funding has been lapsed since February 14 for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as Democratic lawmakers demand reforms in the wake of Trump's deadly immigration crackdown in Minnesota.

However, DHS also oversees the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the agency responsible for airport security screenings, meaning staff around the country have worked for weeks without pay.

Many TSA agents have begun calling out from work, prompting soaring wait times at screening lines, sometimes as high as multiple hours.

More than 300 TSA employees have quit since the shutdown began on February 14, according to the DHS, while US media reported that unscheduled absences had more than doubled.

Travelers stand in long lines at Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport on Sunday in Atlanta, Georgia. The travel disruptions continue as hundreds of TSA agents quit or work without pay during a partial government shutdown. AFP

Trump gold coin celebrating 250 years of US Independence

WASHINGTON, PTI: US President Donald Trump is all set to feature on a gold coin to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary, amid questions over the legality of the move.

The 24-karat gold coin, portraying Trump leaning on the Resolute desk with clenched fists, will be only the second time a living president has featured on a coin.

Earlier, Calvin Coolidge, the 30th US President had featured on a commemorative coin alongside George Washington that were minted in 1926 to celebrate 150 years of the US Independence.

The US Commission on Fine Arts approved the design of the commemorative gold coin. "As we approach our 250th birthday, we are thrilled to prepare coins that represent the enduring spirit of our country, and there is no profile more emblematic for the front of such coins than that of our President, Donald J. Trump," US Treasurer Brandon Beach said.

Nepali youth demand release of govt report into deadly September uprising

KATHMANDU, AFP

Nepali youth staged a demonstration in Kathmandu on Sunday, demanding the release of findings into the deadly 2025 uprising, which forced the previous government to collapse.

At least 77 people were killed in the September 8-9 protests which began over a brief social media ban, but tapped into longstanding fury over corruption and economic hardship. No one has been held accountable for the deaths.

Just days after Nepal went to the polls March 5, interim leader Sushila Karki formed a commission to probe the violence -- in which parliament and scores of government buildings were set ablaze.

More than 200 people were questioned, including ousted former prime minister KP Sharma Oli, and a 900-page report with an additional 8,000 pages of evidence were submitted to the commission for investigation. "We are here seeking the report of why the incident happened, why so many youths were killed," Sanatan Rijal, a 26-year-old activist told AFP.

Laxmi Ghimire, another activist at Sunday's protest, said "promoting a motto of good governance will not make the country and its people feel it".

Sunday's demonstration is one of many that have erupted in Nepal's capital over the past week calling on the interim government for transparency.

Karki said the interim government would make a summary of findings public but would entrust the newly elected RSP, with how to implement any of the commission's possible recommendations.

Activists spatter a woman with red powder to symbolize blood during a protest demanding the release of the inquiry report by a Nepal government on Sept 2025 youth-led uprising. AFP

Italy holds high-stakes referendum on judicial reform

ROME, AFP: Italians began voting Sunday in a two-day referendum on reforms that Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni says will make the judiciary more independent -- but which critics argue will do the opposite.

The poll risks turning into a referendum on the far-right leader herself, ahead of parliamentary elections next year.

Meloni's hard-right government wants to change Italy's constitution to separate the role of judges and prosecutors and reform their oversight body.

She says the plan is essential to guarantee impartiality and improve the functioning of Italy's creaking justice system.

It will make it "more modern, more meritocratic, more autonomous, more accountable and above all, free from political constraints", Meloni said in a video this week.

But critics condemn it as a political power grab that fails to address the real challenges, from years-long trials to prison overcrowding.

Elly Schlein, the leader of the centre-left Democratic Party, said it was badly drafted and "weakens the independence of the judiciary".

"We have to vote 'no' because the independence of our judicial system is fundamental," Margherita Rossi, a 21-year-old student who came from Milan to Rome to vote, told AFP.

"There is no turnout threshold: even if only 10 people show up, they'll still be able to change the constitution."

Opinion polls show the two camps are neck-and-neck.

A decisive "No" would be a blow for Meloni, who has led an uncharacteristically stable coalition government since October 2022.

However, she has dismissed suggestions that she might quit if she loses.

Merz's party leads in Germany state vote: Exit polls

MAINZ, AFP: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's conservative CDU party ousted the centre-left Social Democratic Party on Sunday in a closely watched state election in which the far right also made big gains, according to exit polls.

The CDU took around 30% of the vote to win the western state of Rhineland-Palatinate away from the SPD after 35 years, while the far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD) looked set for a record score in western Germany, with around 20%, according to two public TV networks' exit polls.

For Merz, battling to shore up Western support for Ukraine and facing the looming threat of an energy shock caused by the Iran war, victory in Rhineland-Palatinate would be a relief.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

A Kurdish woman wears a headband reading "New Year" during a Kurdish celebration of the Nowruz (Noruz) marking the New Year of the Persian calendar and the first day of spring, in Istanbul on Sunday. AFP

Seven killed in Qatar helicopter crash due to technical malfunction

▸ Seven people have been killed in a helicopter crash in Qatar's territorial waters, Qatar and Turkey said on Sunday, reports Reuters from Cairo.

The Qatari and Turkish defence ministries said the helicopter had crashed after suffering a technical malfunction, which the Qatari ministry said was during "routine duty".

Four of those killed were Qatari armed forces personnel, one was from the Qatar-Turkey joint forces and two were technicians, the Turkish and Qatari defence ministries said. "Military cooperation and coordination activities between the Republic of Turkey and the State of Qatar continue uninterrupted within the framework of existing agreements and plans," the Turkish defence ministry said.

Japanese detained in Iran freed

▸ Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Sunday that one of two Japanese nationals detained in Iran has been released and will be returning to Japan, reports AP from Tokyo.

Motegi, speaking on a Fuji Television talk show, said the person had been detained since last year and was released on Wednesday.

He said another Japanese national who was arrested earlier this year is still in custody.

Motegi said the release came after his repeated demands to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and that he is "working to win an early release" of the other detainee while communicating with his family and other concerned parties.

The Committee to Protect Journalists has named the person detained in Iran in January as a journalist at Japan's public broadcaster NHK.

The CPJ said the NHK journalist was arrested January 20 by IRGC Corps and was transferred February 23 to Evin Prison, quoting unidentified sources citing fear of persecution.

A resident throws out water from her house in West Nyakach, Kisumu County, on Sunday. Torrential storms that have triggered flash floods in Kenya have killed at least 81 people this month, authorities said. AFP

Nato chief downplays rift with US

▸ Mark Rutte, Nato's secretary-general, acknowledged on Sunday that Trump has been angry at other countries over his push to get allies more involved in reopening the Strait of Hormuz, reports AP from Dubai.

But Rutte stressed during an interview with Fox News that more than 20 countries now are "coming together to implement his vision" to ensure the shipping channel can function. Rutte, who said he spoke with Trump several times this week, said it was "crucial" that the US was taking military action in Iran since its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes posed an "existential" threat to the world.

Curbs continue in Nepal district

▸ Restrictive orders were re-imposed on Sunday in southern Nepal's Kapilvastu district that had witnessed a clash between two communities turn violent, reports PTI from Kathmandu.

As the situation remained tense, the District Administration Office, Kapilvastu re-imposed the restrictive orders in parts of Maharajgunj Municipality in the district.

According to Janardan Gautam, Chief District Officer of Kapilvastu, the step was taken as per the decision of the district security committee.

The order restricts people from making a gathering, rallies and demonstrations in different parts of the municipality.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi inspect the honour guard during a welcome ceremony at the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's naval base in Yokosuka, south of Tokyo, on Sunday. REUTERS

Cricket Australia unveils gruelling 2026-27 schedule

MELBOURNE, PTI: Cricket Australia on Sunday unveiled its 2026-27 international calendar with a packed itinerary leaving little turnaround time ahead of the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India, expected to begin in mid or late-January.

The five-Test away series against India next year is set to be a decisive phase in an unprecedented and taxing schedule for Pat Cummins' ageing side.

Australia are slated to play 10 Tests in a 14-week window between December and March, making it one of the most demanding stretches in their history.

The home season will commence in August 2026, with two Tests against Bangladesh and conclude in March 2027 with a day-night spectacle at the MCG - the 150th anniversary Test against England.

Australia's Test schedule: August: Two Tests vs Bangladesh (home); **October:** Three Tests vs South Africa (away); **December-January:** Four Tests vs New Zealand (home); **January-March:** Five Tests vs India (away); **March 11-15:** 150th anniversary Test vs England (home); **June:** WTC final (if qualified, England); **June-August:** Five Tests vs England (away).

CSK induct Raina, Hayden into first-ever Hall of Fame

CHENNAI, PTI: Chennai Super Kings on Sunday inducted former India all-rounder Suresh Raina and Australia batting great Matthew Hayden into the franchise's first-ever Hall of Fame.

The announcement was made during the team's fan event "Roar'26" at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Raina was part of the CSK franchise from the inception in 2008 till 2021. He was a part of four IPL winning CSK squads -- 2010, 2011, 2018 and 2021. Fondly known as 'Chinna Thala' among fans, he was also a member of CSK's Champions League T20-winning squads in 2010 and 2014, earning the Player of the Tournament award in the latter edition for scoring 234 runs.

He is also the highest run getter for the Super Kings with 5529 runs, including two centuries and 38 half centuries. Hayden was part of the Super Kings squad from 2008 to 2010.

Suresh Raina

K'taka name State TT teams

BENGALURU, DHNS: Karnataka have announced the Under-15, Under-13 and Under-11 State sides to take part in the 87th Sub-junior and Cadet National Table Tennis Championships, to be held at Gandhidham in Gujarat from March 23-31.

Veeresh Mathapati has been named the coach-cum-manager for the boys' team while the girls' side will be under the guidance of Sangam Bailoor.

Squads: U-15 Boys: Reyansh Jalan, Tamoghna M, Vedant Vashisht, Aman George Thomas.
U-13 Boys: Siddhanth M, Arnav Mithun, Mohith Belavadi, Satwik M.
U-11 Boys: Sharvil Karambelkar, Arnav Mithun.
Coach Cum Manager (Boys Team): Veeresh Mathapati.
U-15 Girls: Rashi Rao, Tanishka Kalabhairav, Mihika Udupa, Krisha Karkera.
U-13 Girls: Sakshya Santosh, Mihika Udupa, Yuktha Harsha, Lakshmi Aashritha.
U-11 Girls: Sakshya Santosh, Nandana Bandi.
Coach Cum Manager (Girls Team): Sangam Bailoor.

◆ ON TV ◆

FOOTBALL

ISL: East Bengal FC vs Mohammedan SC **(7:30 pm)**.
LIVE on **Sony Sports Network**.

After faltering in the Eliminator twice, Lucknow Super Giants seek to go the distance

LSG hope for Pant's renaissance

VIGNESH BHARADWAJ
BENGALURU, DHNS

IPL 2026
5 days to go

Elegance and effortlessness are among the adjectives used to describe a typical left-handed batter, someone who oozes class and is pleasing on the eye. However, the flamboyant Rishabh Pant is not that cricketer.

He's a box-office entertainer who defines the laws of physics, a perennial match-winner and one who does not allow the outside noise (exorbitant price tag here) to get into his head. But, last season was different and things did not go as per plan.

While he ended IPL 2025 with a stunning 118 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Pant had an underwhelming run with the bat, scoring just 151 runs in 12 innings before that.

Coming into his second season as LSG skipper after the franchise shelled out Rs 27 crore, the stakes could not be any higher for the Roorkee man.

With Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan the automatic wicketkeeper choices, the success of Pant as a batter will be as important as the success of Pant as a captain to stay in India's white-ball reckoning. And for a certain Super Giants, they will desperately hope for his renaissance.

On paper, LSG have the ability to string in impressive performances, but it is execution in crunch situations and tackling inconsistency that needs repair.

The top four is stacked with talent and explosiveness, enough to put fear into any opposition. Aiden Markram's T20 World Cup form and Mitchell Marsh's brilliant last IPL give LSG a launching pad at the top.

Then there is Nicholas Pooran. The Trinidadian has been redefining the art of T20 batting and was among the most explosive batters last season, hitting the most sixes (40) in the competition. However, he might have to drop down a position from No. 3 despite having his best season. Pant, who is expected to earn a batting promotion to No. 3, will leave Pooran as a floater.

Rishabh Pant

Nicholas Pooran

Mohammed Shami

LSG's lower-middle-order batting is a concern and will depend on how Indians Ayush Badoni, Abdul Samad and Shabhaz Ahmed fare.

Coming to the bowling, they traded Mohammed Shami from Sunrisers Hyderabad for Rs 10 crore. And if there is a weakness, it could be over-dependence on the experienced quick, with two of their potential starters, Mayank Yadav and Mohsin Khan, having not played much cricket recently. And that could work in favour of Avesh Khan. LSG have struggled to take wickets in overs 7-16 and the acquisition of Wanindu Hasaranga addressed the issue. However, there is uncertainty regarding his participation and he will need a fitness No Objection Certificate from Sri Lanka Cricket.

It was also a brave call from LSG to leave out former world No. 1 T20 bowler Ravi Bishnoi for one season-hit Digvesh Rathi.

The lack of a quality all-rounder in the top six is a slight concern for any T20 side. And for LSG, none of the top five can consistently give four overs, which means they will need to play five specialist bowlers (IP included).

> Attitude is your friend, right? We got 25 gun players, just 11 players can play. Maybe 12. And everyone one of you can make the first 11. If you are here to cruise, that is just not good enough. Every time you bat or bowl, go at it with full intensity.
> **Justin Langer,** Head Coach

But Lucknow and Langer won't be sweating too much as the head coach prefers a five-bowler tactic, which Perth Scorchers thrived under his guidance.

Bowling coach Bharat Arun will have his task cut out with an array of exciting fast bowling talent in the mix. He will be part of a high-profile support staff that includes Tom Moody (Director of Cricket) and Lance Klusener (assistant coach).

But the major issue for these men is ensuring that the whole is greater than the sum of Super Giants' individual talents to go all the way.

Squad: Abdul Samad, Ayush Badoni, Aiden Markram, Matthew Breetzke, Himmat Singh, Rishabh Pant (c), Nicholas Pooran, Mitchell Marsh, Shahbaz Ahmed, Arshin Kulkarni, Mayank Yadav, Avesh Khan, Mohsin Khan, Manimaran Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Prince Yadav, Akash Singh, Mohammed Shami, Arjun Tendulkar, Wanindu Hasaranga, Anrich Nortje, Mukul Choudhary, Naman Tiwari, Akshat Raghuwanshi, Josh Inglis.
Best finishes: Eliminator (2022, 2023)

Shanaka set to join RR as Curran's replacement

NEW DELHI, PTI: In yet another blow to Pakistan Super League, Sri Lanka captain and all-rounder Dasun Shanaka is set to join Rajasthan Royals as a replacement for the injured Sam Curran in the upcoming Indian Premier League.

The move will make Shanaka the latest player to switch from the PSL to the IPL after Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani pulled out of his contract with Islamabad United to join Kolkata Knight Riders as a replacement for Mustafizur Rahman.

"Dasun's signing is pending owing to his paperwork in the PSL, which is a formality. He is likely to join the squad in Guwahati," a team source said.

RR will begin their campaign against Chennai Super Kings in Guwahati, their home venue in the first phase of the IPL schedule that has been announced so far.

Under Shanaka's leadership, co-hosts Sri Lanka had crashed out in the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup,

Shanaka scored 165 runs including a 31-ball 76 not out against Pakistan, while he also took three wickets in the T20 World Cup.

Having gone unsold at the IPL's mini-auction last December, Shanaka was picked up by Lahore Qalandars.

Dasun Shanaka

Dyf for feature

HYDERABAD SELECTIONS

Dyf, to be ridden by P Trevor and trained by Adhiraj S Jodha, is tipped the spoils in the Golconda St Leger (Gr 3) over 2800M, the main event of the races to be held here on Monday. The first race starts at 3 pm.
1. Osman Sagar Plate (Div II) -- 1100M: Aquatone 1; Cypress 2; Shooting Star 3.
2. Yadadri Plate -- 1100M: Yali 1; Trishika 2; Cosmic Gift 3.
3. Osman Sagar Plate (Div I) -- 1100M: Petra Act 1; Roxxane 2; Clarity 3.
4. Sea Bird Plate -- 1100M: NRI High Power 1; Sharanga 2; Foxy Girl 3.
5. Golconda St Leger (Gr 3) -- 2800M: Dyf 1; Star Of Night 2; Pyrite 3.
6. Dream Girl Plate -- 1400M: Knight Regent 1; Lifes Journey 2; Gloria 3.
7. Pocharam Plate -- 1600M: Genie 1; NRI Star 2; Ilene 3. **Jackpot:** 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. **I mini jackpot:** 1, 2, 3, 4. **II mini jackpot:** 4, 5, 6, 7. **I treble:** 2, 3, 4. **II treble:** 5, 6, 7.

Sinner makes a smooth start

Italian World No. 2, Russian Medvedev & defending champ Mensik advance

MIAMI, AFP

World No. 2 Jannik Sinner made a smooth start Saturday at the Miami Open, where defending champion Jakub Mensik shook off a "horrible" first set to win his opening match.

Six days after he lifted the Indian Wells trophy, Sinner launched his pursuit of tennis' "Sunshine Double" in confident style with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over 76th-ranked Damir Dzumhur.

"First-round matches are never easy," said the 24-year-old Italian, who won the 2024 Miami crown.

After beating Daniil Medvedev for his first Indian Wells title, Sinner is trying to become the first to sweep the Indian Wells and Miami ATP Masters 1000 titles since Roger Federer in 2017.

He pocketed the first set against Dzumhur in 34 minutes and broke the Bosnian for a 2-1 lead in the second set before breaking again on match point with a backhand winner.

Former No. 1 Medvedev also had little time to adjust, but he managed to fight back for a 6-7 (12), 6-3, 6-1 victory over 19-year-old Japanese wildcard Rei Sakamoto.

Mensik was feeling the after-effects of illness as well as the pressure of defending his title in a rocky first set but righted the ship to beat Australian Adam Walton 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

Fourth-seeded German Alexander Zverev cruised into the third round with a 6-2, 6-4 victory over 133rd-ranked American Martin Damm. But eighth-seeded home hope Ben Shelton was ousted by Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko 6-7 (3), 7-6 (3), 6-3.

Coco Gauff returns during her third-round win over Alycia Parks at the Miami Open in Florida on Saturday. AFP

Gauff fights back

Fourth-seeded Coco Gauff led the way into the women's fourth round, roaring back for a 3-6, 6-0, 6-1 victory over fellow American Alycia Parks.

Teenagers Mirra Andreeva and Victoria Mboko booked a last-16 meeting that will be their third clash of the WTA season.

Eighth-seeded Russian Andreeva defeated Czech Marie Bouzkova 7-6 (4), 6-2, while 10th-seeded Canadian Mboko downed Russian qualifier Anastasia Zakharova 6-1, 7-5.

Andreeva, 18, and 19-year-old Mboko have split their last two matches, Andreeva winning in the final at Adelaide in January before Mboko sent her packing in the third round at Doha.

Alexandra Eala reached the last 16 with a 6-3, 7-6 (2) victory over Poland's Magda Linette -- who had toppled third-ranked compatriot Iga Swiatek in the second round.

Maharaj, Subrayen help Proteas pull level over New Zealand

WELLINGTON, AFP: South Africa's spinners played a decisive role as the tourists won the fourth Twenty20 international against New Zealand by 19 runs on Sunday to square the five-match series 2-2.

New Zealand were well placed to clinch the series midway through their chase in Wellington after the Proteas scored 164-5.

However, from 88-3 after 10 overs, they lost wickets in rapid succession to be all out for 145 off 18.5 overs.

It sends the series, played between weakened sides from both countries, to a decider in Christchurch on Wednesday.

The match swung in favour of South Africa when spinners Keshav Maharaj and Prenelan Subrayen turned the screws through the middle stages of the chase.

Captain Maharaj is comfortably the most experienced member of an experimental tour squad and proved hard to score from as he took 2-22 off four overs.

Subrayen, playing his first T20 international, bowled Dane Cleaver for 26 to spark New Zealand's middle order crumble and finished with 2-13 off three overs.

Maharaj said his side played with more energy than in defeats in Hamilton and Auckland.

"It was a perfect response to two disappointing losses in a row," he said.

"Coming into this game, you could see there was a little bit more energy and hunger.

"We are a young team, finding our way in international cricket so it takes a little bit of time."

Opener Tim Robinson top-scored with 32 for New Zealand while Proteas paceman Gerald Coetzee took 3-31.

South Africa's innings were dominated by 57 off 36 balls from wicketkeeper Connor Esterhuizen **(in pic)**.

Brief scores: South Africa: 164/5 in 20 overs (Connor Esterhuizen 57, Rubin Hermann 28; Kyle Jamieson 2-29) bt New Zealand: 145 all out in 18.5 overs (Tim Robinson 32, Dane Cleaver 26; Gerald Coetzee 3-31, Ottneil Baartman 2-30, Prenelan Subrayen 2-13, Keshav Maharaj 2-22).
Result: South Africa won by 19 runs.
PoM: Connor Esterhuizen.
Series: South Africa level series 2-2.
Fifth T20I: March 25 (Christchurch).

Ultimo wins main event

MUMBAI RESULTS

Ultimo, ridden by P Trevor and trained by PS Chouhan, won the Seth Ramnath Daga Trophy over 1400M, the main event of the races held here on Sunday.
1. Dopahar Trophy -- 1000M: Azure (Akshay Kumar) 1; Enforcer (Yash Narredu) 2 and Chelsea (Dashrath Singh) 2; Storm Cloud (A Sandesh) 4; WB: 3/4, Dht, 3L; T: 57.24s; TB: Imtiaz Sait; Fav: Azure.
2. Homi Mehta Trophy - 2000M: Golden Dancer (Akshay Kumar) 1; Endurance (Yash Narredu) 2; Kimiko (P Trevor) 3; Exuma (NS Parmar) 4; WB: 4, Lnk, 1-3/4L; T: 2:02.32; TB: Dallas Todywalla; Fav: Endurance.
3. MH Ahmedbhoy Trophy -- 1600M: Tajiri (P Trevor) 1; Juracan (Akshay Kumar) 2; Giant Gold (Yash Narredu) 3; Ekatarina (Neeraj Rawal) 4; WB: 1-1/2, 1/2, 3-1/2L; T: 1:36.30; TB: Faisal A Abbas; Fav: Juracan.
4. Seth Ramnath Daga Trophy -- 1400M: Ultimo (P Trevor) 1; Irish Gold (Akshay Kumar) 2; Market King (Yash Narredu) 3; Mojito (PP Dhebe) 4; WB: 1-1/2, 3/4, Ns; T: 1:21.57; TB: PS Chouhan; Fav: Ultimo.
5. Truefitt & Hill Royal Heritage Cup -- 1400M: Ministry Of Time (P Trevor) 1; Ashwa Ankara (Vivek G) 2; Saseka (Neeraj Rawal) 3; Simola (C Umesh) 4; WB: 3/4, 1-3/4, 3L; T: 1:23.18; TB: Aman Hussain; Fav: Ministry Of Time.
6. Racing Journalists Trophy -- 1200M: Heaven's Rhythm (Yash Narredu) 1; Absolute Gorgeous (Dashrath Singh) 2; Eloquent (S Mosin) 3; Appalachian (TS Jodha) 4; NR: Esteban; WB: Shd, Lnk, 1L; T: 1:10.11; TB: M Narredu; Fav: Heaven's Rhythm.
Bengaluru dividends
I race: Rs 19w, Rs 14, Rs 12, Rs 2p; Fc: Rs 89 & Rs 89; Q: Rs 70 & Rs 70; SHP: Rs 21 & Rs 38; Tri: Rs 441 & Rs 441; Exp: Rs 893 & Rs 285.
II race: Rs 23w, Rs 10, Rs 16p; Fc: Rs 26; Q: Rs 14; SHP: Rs 26; THP: Rs 15; Tri: Rs 37 & Rs 27.
III race: Rs 19w, Rs 10, Rs 13, Rs 12p; Fc: Rs 61; Q: Rs 41; SHP: Rs 34; THP: Rs 37; Tri: Rs 85 & Rs 32; Exp: Rs 356 & Rs 292.
IV race: Rs 16w, Rs 10, Rs 17w; F: Rs 49; Q; Rs 38; SHP: Rs 23; THP: Rs 25; Tri: Rs 36 & Rs 14; Exp: Rs 100 & Rs 62.
V race: Rs 21w, Rs 12, Rs 11, Rs 18p; Fc: Rs 52; Q: Rs 28; SHP: Rs 30; THP: Rs 57; Tri: Rs 71 & Rs 58; Exp: Rs 774 & Rs 758.
VI race: Rs 21w, Rs 14, Rs 14, Rs 58p; Fc: Rs 71; Q: Rs 50; SHP: Rs 41; THP: Rs 206; Tri: Rs 4913 & Rs 1637; Exp: Rs 16293 & Rs 10474.
I Jackpot: Rs 588 & Rs 70.
I Treble: Rs 89.

Diksha, Hitaashee finish inside top 10 at Aus Championship

GOLD COAST, PTI: The Indian duo of Diksha Dagar and Hitaashee Bakshi finished in the top-10 at the Australian Women's PGA Championship here.

Diksha carded a final round of 1-over 72 to end the week as the top Indian with a Tied-7 finish at a total of 8-under par.

Hitaashee also had a good end to the week, finishing Tied-9 after carding 2-over 73 in her final round for a total score of 7-under par.

Local star Hannah Green made it three titles in three events, sealing her second LET title and third title of 2026 with a final score of 16-under par.

Diksha started her final round with a bogey on the first hole before making her first birdie of the day on the fourth hole. Dagar dropped shots with bogeys on the fifth, eighth and ninth holes to be 2-over par in nine holes.

Late birdies on the 17th and 18th holes allowed her to pick up two strokes and close the day with a total of 8-under par.

This top-10 finish is the second time Diksha Dagar has finished in the top 10 this season, having played only five events.

Aditi slips

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok slipped down the leaderboard to Tied-24 from Tied-3 after carded 1-over 73 on the third day of the Fortinet Founders Cup in California. Hyo Joo Kim extended her lead, and is now five strokes clear of her closest rival with just one day left.

Abhay, Anahat emerge champions

MUMBAI, PTI: Local favourites Abhay Singh and Anahat Singh won the men's and women's singles titles respectively on the final day of the JSW Indian Open 2026 squash tournament at the CCI here on Sunday.

The men's title clash was an all-Indian battle, with the second seeded Abhay overpowering his four seeded compatriot Veer Chotrani 3-0 (11-9 11-8 11-4).

Young sensation Anahat blew away Hana Moataz of Egypt 3-1 (11-5 11-6 9-11 11-6) in the women's title clash.

Abhay was in superb form in the men's final. Although Chotrani produced a spirited fight in the first two games, the second seed zoomed up a gear as the match progressed. The opening game was a hard-fought battle with every point contested fiercely. Abhay finally prevailed in the see-saw battle to take the opening game 11-9 and take the lead.

Anahat Singh

Abhay Singh

The second game followed a similar script with every point witnessing long rallies keeping the spectators hooked. However, Abhay managed to quell an intense challenge by his compatriot to win 11-8 and extend his lead.

Anahat prevails

Earlier, top seeded Anahat came up with a sublime performance to outclass Hana and clinch the women's title.

Although the second seeded Egyptian was a much experienced contender, the younger Anahat was in a league all her own.

The top seeded Indian came up with a lethal combination of deception and speedy cross-court movements to leave her second seeded opponent struggling to match her pace.

During the initial exchanges, both opponents were equally matched, matching each other blow.

The first game saw the lead change hands after almost every other rally before the Indian rattled off six consecutive points and surge into the lead.

Anahat continued her dominance in the second game as well, building up a comfortable 5-1 lead in double quick time.

Koneru Humpy

Humpy withdraws from FIDE Women's Candidates

NEW DELHI, PTI: Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy on Sunday decided to withdraw from the FIDE Women's Candidates Tournament, citing concerns over her personal safety despite assurances from the organisers in the wake of the ongoing West Asia conflict.

The Candidates, which will decide the challengers for the world championship crowns currently held by D Gukesh (men) and Ju Wenjun (women), is scheduled to begin in Paphos, Cyprus on March 28.

The former world champion said the decision, though difficult, was necessary given the prevailing circumstances.

"After deep reflection, I have taken the difficult decision to withdraw from the FIDE Women's Candidates Tournament," Humpy said in a statement on 'X'.

"No event, no matter how important, can come before personal safety and well-being. Despite the assurances provided, I do not feel fully secure under the current circumstances.

"This is a painful but necessary decision, and I stand by it."

Humpy's withdrawal comes as a setback for India, as she was among the leading contenders in the tournament that determines the challenger for the women's world championship title.

ATHLETICS WORLD INDOORS

A Duplantis masterclass

Swede equals the great Bubka's record of four golds; Ehammer dazzles

TORUN (POLAND), AFP

Sweden's Armand Duplantis celebrates after winning the men's pole vault gold on Saturday. REUTERS

Armand Duplantis delivered a pole vault masterclass to win a fourth world indoor title on Saturday as Josh Kerr outgunned Cole Hocker for victory in a stacked 3,000m.

In a thrilling night of track and field in the Polish city of Torun, Switzerland's Simon Ehammer set a sensational new world record in the men's heptathlon while Italy's Zaynab Dosso upstaged her rivals for gold in a loaded 60m.

Duplantis' return to the venue where he set his first world record (of 6.17m) back in 2020 proved a fortuitous one.

The US-born Swede totally dominated proceedings, nailing all six of his vaults with aplomb to win with a commanding best of 6.25 metres, a championship record.

Greece's Emmanouil Karalis claimed silver (6.05m), but his gamble on passing at heights to push the bar higher to up the pressure on Duplantis backfired.

It was Duplantis' fourth world title, equalling Sergey Bubka's record.

"The arena in Torun has a special place in my heart - it changed my life as this is where I set my first world record," said Duplantis.

"It is great to come back here and compete in front of this crowd. Perhaps a few of them saw me set that first record as well!"

Kerr, who won the world indoor title two years ago but sustained a calf tear at last year's 1,500m final at the world outdoors in Tokyo, hit the bell for the last lap of the 3,000m in the lead.

And the Briton did not cede first place despite intense pressure from fast-finishing all-rounder Hocker, who already has Olympic 1,500m and world 5,000m titles to his name.

It was the unlikely figure of Ehammer who took centre stage earlier in the evening, the 26-year-old Swiss bettering American Ashton Eaton's 14-year-old world record.

In a display of consistency, Ehammer produced four top performances in the seven-discipline event held over two days.

He left just enough in the tank to finish the final event, the lung-busting 1,000m, for a points total of 6,670, beating by 15pts the mark Eaton set at the 2012 Istanbul world indoors.

Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas was unable to mimic Duplantis in her quest for a fourth world indoor title.

The former world and Olympic champion, who is also the world record holder, had to settle for second, 9cm behind current world champion Leyanis Perez Hernandez of Cuba (14.95m).

In a nail-biting finish to the women's 3,000m, Italy's Olympic and world 10,000m silver medallist Nadia Battocletti stormed home for gold in 8:57.64.

Canada's Christopher Morales Williams set a championship record of 44.76sec for victory in the men's 400m, while the women's two-lap race went to Lurdes Gloria Manuel of the Czech Republic in 50.76sec.

There was home delight as Natalia Bukowiecka claimed silver behind Manuel before Jakub Szymanski set the crowd on fire with victory in the men's 60m hurdles in 7.40sec.

Walsh shines

New Zealand's Tom Walsh left it late to bag a fourth World Indoor shot put title on Sunday.

The 34-year-old, who previously won World Indoor golds in 2016, 2018 and 2025, managed a best of 21.82 metres with his sixth attempt. The two-time Olympic bronze medallist had moved into pole position with his fifth effort of 21.66m, and eventually finished 18cm ahead of American silver medallist Jordan Geist (21.64m).

A second American, Roger Steen, rounded out the podium with a best of 21.49m.

Portugal's Sao Tome-born Agate de Sousa won the women's long jump with a best of 6.92m, with just two finals in the morning session of the third and final day of competition in the Polish city.

Italy's Larissa Iapichino claimed silver, just 5cm adrift, with Colombia's Natalia Linares rounding out the podium (6.80).

City make Arsenal pay the price

O'Reilly stars in League Cup glory with a brace

LONDON, AFP

Manchester City punished Kepa Arrizabalaga's howler to lift the League Cup as Nico O'Reilly's double sealed a 2-0 win against Arsenal in Sunday's final at Wembley.

Arsenal goalkeeper Kepa already had a tortured relationship with the League Cup and the Spaniard's latest mishap in the tournament's showpiece proved decisive.

Allowing Rayan Cherki's cross to slip through his fingers, Kepa presented O'Reilly with the chance to put City ahead in the second half.

O'Reilly struck again just four minutes later to seal City's ninth League Cup, giving boss Pep Guardiola a record fifth triumph in the competition.

Mikel Arteta chose to ignore Kepa's League Cup history when he selected the former Chelsea keeper instead of first-choice David Raya, but the gamble backfired spectacularly.

Playing for Chelsea in the 2019 final, he infamously refused to be substituted just before the shoot-out, then failed to save a single kick, while in the 2022 defeat against Liverpool he missed a penalty in a shoot-out.

Arsenal's failure to win the first trophy since the 2020 FA Cup was a painful blow, ending their bid to land an unprecedented quadruple.

They paid the price for Arteta's unnecessarily conservative tactics, but the season is far from over for the north Londoners.

Result: Arsenal: 0 lt to Manchester City: 2 (O'Reilly 60th, 64th).

Spurs falter

Tottenham suffered a potentially seismic 3-0 defeat to Premier League relegation rivals Nottingham Forest on Sunday, failing to rise to a rallying call from their massed ranks of fans. Thousands lined the streets to cheer the squad before the crunch fixture.

Results: Leeds: 0 drew with Brentford: 0; Newcastle: 1 (Gordon 10th) lt to Sunderland: 2 (Talbi 57th, Brobbey 90th); Aston Villa: 2 (McGinn 15th, Watkins 68th) bt West Ham: 0; Tottenham: 0 lt to Nottingham Forest: 3 (Jesus 45th, Gibbs-White 62nd, Awoniyi 87th).

Manchester City's Nico O'Reilly scores during their League Cup final win over Arsenal on Sunday. AFP

Bengaluru find their mojo with 3-1 win

KOLKATA, PTI

Bengaluru FC picked up a massive three points on the road with a victory over Inter Kashi in the Indian Super League. X

Braian Sanchez scored a brace to help Bengaluru FC register a 3-1 win over Inter Kashi FC in an Indian Super League match here on Sunday.

The win took BFC to fourth position in the points table and three points behind the leaders, Mumbai City FC.

Rahul Bheke achieved a personal milestone as he made his 100th appearance for BFC.

Ashique Kuruniyan gave BFC the lead in the 20th minute before Sanchez struck in the 69th and 90+8th minute. Alfred Moya scored the lone goal for Inter Kashi in the 38th minute.

BFC faced an early setback before kick-off, as Ryan Williams picked up a slight muscle strain during warmup and was replaced by Namgyal Bhutia on the flank for his first start in the ISL this season.

After finding their rhythm and dominating possession in the opening minutes, BFC broke the deadlock in the 20th minute of the game, when Ashique pounced on a loose ball after an error from the Inter Kashi backline, and finished it off with a powerful left footed shot into the roof of the net.

The lead for BFC did not last long, as Alfred made the most of a Poojary slip that put him through one-on-one with BFC goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh, who despite getting a hand to it could not keep Alfred out as Inter Kashi drew level in the 38th minute.

At the break, it was all square as both teams headed into the tunnel.

BFC made one change before the second half as Suresh Wangjam replaced Fanai in the middle of the park, who was on a yellow card. In the 69th minute, after Ashique drew a foul on the left flank, Siroj's set piece delivery was not gathered by Tarres, and Sanchez was present to head it in to put BFC ahead.

Result: Inter Kashi: 1 (Planas 38th) lt to Bengaluru FC: 3 (Kuruniyan 20th, Sanchez 69th, 90th+8).

Araujo header helps Barca extend lead

BARCELONA, AFP

Ronald Araujo

Ronald Araujo's header helped Barcelona extend their lead on Real Madrid at the top of La Liga to seven points with a tight 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano on Sunday.

Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid host Atletico Madrid, fourth, later on in a derby clash.

Araujo nodded home Joao Cancelo's corner after 24 minutes to secure the three points at Camp Nou but goalkeeper Joan Garcia's superb display played just as big a part in their victory.

Hansi Flick's side were caught snoozing in the opening stages but Garcia made a fine save to deny Carlos Martin from close range.

Called up by Luis de la Fuente to the Spanish national team, Garcia made several excellent saves to keep Rayo at bay, with the Madrid side dominant in the second half.

At the other end Raphinha was guilty of profligate finishing on numerous occasions. The winger scuffed wide after picking Pathe Ciss's pocket and charging through on goal.

Sevilla's struggles

Sevilla stayed three points above the bottom three after the loss to Valencia, which went up to 11th place with its fourth victory in six matches.

Results: On Sunday: Result: Barcelona: 1 (Araujo 24th) bt Rayo Vallecano: 0.
On Saturday: Elche: 2 (Mir 62nd, Morente 71st) bt Mallorca: 1 (Torre 58th); Levante: 4 (Espi 4th, 25th, Losada 52nd, Romero 90th+3) bt Real Oviedo: 2 (Chaira 44th, Vinas 45th+3-pen); Sevilla: 0 lt to Valencia: 2 (Duro 38th, Ramazani 45th+5).

LeBron breaks NBA appearance record

LOS ANGELES, AFP

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points in a stormy Oklahoma City Thunder victory over the Washington Wizards on Saturday as LeBron James **(in pic)** added another milestone to his career with a record-breaking 1,612th NBA regular season game.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander bagged his seventh 40-point game of the season to help the Thunder roll to an 11th straight victory, downing Washington 132-111 on the road.

Chet Holmgren added 18 points and 10 rebounds while Isaiah Hartenstein had nine points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists in a game that saw four players ejected during a first half brawl. The altercation, which halted the game for 11 minutes, came with 27 seconds remaining in the second quarter just after Oklahoma City grabbed a 68-63 lead. Thunder forward Jaylin Williams held the ball after the basket and twice bumped into Washington's Justin Champagnie. Ajay Mitchell came up to confront Champagnie and was smacked in the face.

Sanjay stars in Shantinagar win

BENGALURU, DHNS: Sanjay S netted a brace while Roshan Singh and G John Peter scored a goal each as Shanthinagar beat RR Nagar 4-1 in the second edition of the Chief Minister's Cup at the Bangalore Football Stadium here on Sunday.

Results: Shanthi Nagar: 4 (Roshan Singh 14th, G John Peter 50th pen, Sanjay S 83rd, 90th+7) bt RR Nagar: 1 (Robinson A 41st); CV Raman Nagar: 2 (R Sachin 20th, R Sathish Kumar 77th) bt Shivajinagar: 0.

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